



Thursday, December 10, 2015

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MP BID TO SAVE OUR POLICE HQ

By David Cosgrove and Peter Madeley



James Morris MP

Digital speed cameras are to hit streets

NEW average speed cameras will be hitting the streets of Birmingham in the new year.

They will be installed across the city and Solihull for a period of five years but there will be an initial 21-month evaluation phase to assess their effectiveness.

The digital devices will replace nine obsolete 'wet film' safety cameras.

Bosses behind the scheme say they will improve road safety in the city after, in the years 2010 to 2014, there were 2,078 people killed or seriously injured on the city's roads — an average of 416 per year.

West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson said: "When I was elected last year I promised that I would improve road safety and do all I could to reduce the number of injuries and deaths on our roads."

"Speed is one of the biggest cause of deaths on the road and one of the biggest issues that local people raise with me on a daily basis."

"Birmingham and Solihull are installing the cameras and the police are supporting them by processing and enforcing the fines."

Girl, 13, is punched in face by driver

POLICE are hunting a lorry driver who punched a 13-year-old girl in the face, knocking her to the floor, as she walked to school in Rowley Regis.

The attacker also tugged at the terrified girl's hair until her screams alerted passers-by and he fled in a flat-bed lorry.

Police are appealing for help to catch the attacker who struck at the child who was walking in Harvest Road at around 8.15am last Thursday.

Detective Sergeant Andy Robinson said: "The young girl was not seriously injured but understandably extremely distressed by the incident. "This appears to be an isolated incident — we have no other reports of similar offences — and the motive for the assault is unclear. It was certainly a shocking attack in broad daylight. We urgently need to trace the driver."

The attacker is described as white, around 30 years old, 5ft 10ins tall, with short hair. He may have been wearing blue overalls. The flat-bed lorry was blue with a white cab.

Call police on 101 (extension 812 3038) or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

He said the Government's decision to protect overall police spending in real terms in the Spending Review period works out as an increase of £900 million cash by 2019/20.

West Midlands Police have more than £179m in reserves, and underspent by £7m last financial year, he claimed.

Mr Morris, who has started a petition calling for the station to be saved, said: "Given the strong financial position of West Midlands Police, and the Government's commitment to protecting the policing budget, it is now the right time for Mr Jamieson to put on hold his decision to close Halesowen Police Station and consult properly with local people about its future."

"I am clear, as well as the hundreds of people who signed my petition, that local police need a base here in the town."

Sales

A total of 13 Black Country sites are among 28 police buildings in the West Midlands that will shut over the next two years, reducing the number of sites by 10 per cent and bringing in £8.6m through property sales and savings on running costs. A further £3.1m will be saved on maintenance.

Following a consultation, the move passed through the final discussion stage at a meeting of the region's Strategic Policing and Crime Board last week.

Commissioner Jamieson has backed the move, and says that "officers, not buildings" keep people safe.

He said: "Between 2010 and 2015 West Midlands Police was cut harder than any other force in the country, which means we still have difficult decisions to make."

"My priority is always will be people not buildings. Many people from across the political divide have realised this."

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Nurse struck off after hiding attack

A NURSE who throttled his former girlfriend and then tried to hide his assault conviction from his bosses at a Dudley hospital has been kicked out of the profession.

James Kearsey grabbed his ex-partner by the throat at her home in Lancashire in 2013, a hearing was told. Kearsey, who worked at Russells Hall Hospital, left the woman with bruising to her neck.

The hearing was told he failed to inform both hospital chiefs and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) of his conviction for seven months.

The NMC was told that his former partner reported the incident to police who arrested Kearsey on July 12, 2013. He denied committing the of-

fence in interview, suggested he had been acting in self-defence and flatly refuted the assault in Blackpool. After initially pleading not guilty at Dudley Magistrates Court on October 17, 2013, he was convicted of assault by beating the following January. He was sentenced to a 12-month community order including 150 hours of unpaid work. A five-year restraining order was made and he was ordered to pay £500 compensation and costs.

The matter was referred to the NMC last July and they notified Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust of their concerns. A disciplinary hearing was convened last December which resulted in Kearsey's dismissal.

NMC panel chairman Wendy Yeadon said:

"Mr Kearsey failed to notify his employer and the NMC of his conviction over a period of seven months. Moreover, when questioned about his conviction during the investigatory meeting, Mr Kearsey made a deliberate decision to give a fabricated account of events."

"Registered nurses occupy a position of privilege and trust in society and are expected at all times to be professional. Patients and their families must be able to trust registered nurses with their lives and lives of their loved ones."

Kearsey, who was not present or represented, was struck off the nursing register with an 18-month interim ban. He does have an opportunity to appeal the decision.

Workers at council face charges for parking up

UP to 1,000 council workers will be forced to pay for parking while at work in a shake-up of parking charges across Sandwell.

The workers currently do not have to pay to leave their cars parked at the main council house off West Bromwich Street, Oldbury. But now hundreds of employees face having to pay £4 a day, or up to £240 a year, with union officials blasting the authority's plans.

A petition has been launched by public sector union UNISON for staff working in Oldbury who oppose the plan to charge them to park their cars.

Tony Barnsley, joint branch secretary for Sandwell UNISON, claimed up to a thousand staff members could be affected. He said: "These proposed car parking charges are seen by our members as a further cut in pay that the council is choosing to impose regardless of how little they earn. The fact directors will pay the same as cleaners is seen as unfair by our members."

Off-street parking charges across the borough would be set at 40p an hour under the new proposals due to be discussed by the council's cabinet. The new charges would come into effect as soon as possible in the new financial year.

Leader Councillor Darren Cooper said: "We're having to make very difficult decisions. What I wanted to do was have a more balanced approach to car parking. I fully appreciate that staff haven't had a pay rise in the past few years, but the bottom line is some of these services have got to wash their own face."

Workshop to give tree dressing tips

A WORKSHOP has been organised to give people tips on how to dress a Christmas tree.

Members of Cradley Heath Creative are holding the drop-in workshop at Mary MacArthur Gardens in Cradley Heath on Saturday between 11am and 3pm.

The workshop will be held in Cradley Heath Creative's Oss Box and there will be materials such as card, paper, fabric, glue and string for people to get creative with.

The workshop is a collaboration between Cradley Heath Creative and the Friends of Mary MacArthur Gardens, with input from Jangchub Ling Buddhist Centre and the Community Champion at Asda, Netherton.

Councillor's last surgery of year

HALESOWEN North councillor Stuart Henley will be holding his last surgery of the year on Saturday, December 19.

It will be at the library in Long Lane, Halesowen, from 11am to noon. Call 07967 142 367 to attend.

Mosque land battle to cost council £40k

CASH-STRAPPED Dudley Council is to pay £40,000 to Dudley Muslim Association to buy back land subject to a decade-long battle over a proposed mosque.

Council bosses have decided to hand over the sum in order to regain ownership of the site in Hall Street. They hope the money will then be recouped by selling the land.

The saga over the plans to build the mosque was brought to an end last month when appeal judges ruled in favour of the council's bid to seize back the land.

The amount owed by the council would have been much higher but the DMA was ordered to contribute £114,000 towards the council's legal costs following the hearing.

Dudley Council is currently trying to find £20 million worth of savings over the next three years. Finances bosses said the £40,000 bill would be met from its capital budget.

Transferred

They expect to have the land back in its ownership in January and said they anticipate there being some 'site issues' to address before the site is put on the market.

A report by the council's chief executive, Sarah Norman, and council strategic director, Philip Tait, said: "The DMA was ordered to pay a contribution to the council's legal costs amounting to £114,451.30 and the Hall Street land has to be transferred to the council by January 22, 2016. At the same time, the council has to pay to the DMA the purchase price of approximately £155,000. Therefore, the net sum payable by the council to the DMA will be approximately £40,000."

The authority spent more than £200,000 on legal costs battling the mosque bid, which proved to be controversial in the town and sparked five demonstrations by far-right groups. More than 80,000 people signed petitions against plans for the mosque, which would have replaced Castle Hill's Dudley Central Mosque.

Council leader Peter Lowe said the council had offered to help DMA find a suitable site for a new mosque, after the association said it had outgrown the Castle Hill premises and that 'door will be open to them should they wish to proceed'.

Bake Off star aims to inspire children



Ugne Bubnaiyte, of TV's Great British Bake Off, leads a baking workshop for children in Quinton

GREAT British Bake Off star Ugne Bubnaiyte served up a treat for youngsters at a special baking event.

The mother-of-two helped around 20 children cook spiced cookies and bread during the event at the church hall at Christ Church in Quinton on Saturday.

She said: "I have kids myself and we love baking, they always get involved at home, so I'm used to working with kids."

She added: "I thought it would

be nice to show the basics about simple baking, how you can help mum in the kitchen at Christmas."

The baker revealed she loved her time on the hugely popular TV show but was disappointed to have been booted off in week five.

Experience

She said: "It was a shame that I left at the time because I'm very competitive and for me to leave at week five when I was feeling so strong, it was devastating. But the

whole experience was really good. It definitely opened the doors for me and gave me opportunities."

Lithuanian body builder Ugne specialises in 'guilt-free' bakes including gluten and sugar-free cakes. She is currently writing a recipe book, which will feature 'fitness bakes' – a healthier version of baking – due out next autumn.

Linda Paiva, of Rokiel Entertainment which put on the event, said they hoped to encourage more baking in Birmingham.

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



A LABOUR MP says it's time to find a gender-neutral word to replace "fisherman." She is promptly deluged with suggestions including "fish stranglers" and "fish-erudites." My favourite so far is "codbotherers."

ONE of the outstanding moments of the Commons debate on whether to bomb Syria was the short, straightforward speech by Dan Jarvis, reminding us that this plain-speaking 43-year-old ex-soldier would make a formidable Labour Party leader. There is still time.

IS anyone surprised that scrapping the vehicle tax disc has been followed by a doubling in the number of un-taxed cars on the road to more than half a million? If you make it easy to get away with tax dodging, people will dodge taxes. Does anyone in Whitehall have a brain?



A FRIEND is hobbling around and popping Ibuprofen. Why is it that all the conditions we used to laugh about in Les Dawson's comedy routines – gout, bunsions, lumbago and sciatica – are so damn painful in real life?

CAMPAIGNERS claim that two curry restaurants in Britain close every week because of a shortage of trained chefs from the Indian sub-continent. The answer, they insist, is to relax UK migration rules to allow in more skilled chefs. Their argument is that only Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Kashmiri-born cooks could possibly have the necessary skills. What a load of bunkum. For a start, this argument is vaguely racist. Imagine the fury if anyone suggested that only somebody born in England could cook fish and chips, or that haggis-stuffing jobs were reserved exclusively for Scotsmen. Secondly, if the restaurants raised their wages, they might have less difficulty recruiting staff. And finally, it's hardly surprising there's a shortage of chefs if restaurant owners continue to exclude half the available population. When did you last see a female chef in a curry house?

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

EDUCATION chiefs in Dudley have welcomed figures placing the borough above the national average for the quality of its primary schools.

Ofsted's annual report ranks Dudley borough in joint 59th place in the country out of 150 local authorities, with 87 per cent of children going to good or outstanding schools.

The figure marks a rise of one per cent from 2013/14 and represents a three per cent increase in the number of better performing schools in the borough. It also means Dudley is outperforming the rest of the Black Country areas and Staffordshire in the quality of its primary education.

Councillor Ian Cooper, Dudley Council's cabinet member for children's services, said: "We are continually striving to build on the successes in our schools and bring about further improvements wherever possible.

"We have made significant strides in a number of areas, as a result, the percentage of primary schools that are good or better is now 87 per cent, which is better than the national picture.

"A wide range of work has included linking schools together to improve specific areas of the curriculum, such as maths, and we have developed a far reaching school improvement strategy to drive standards up

By Peter Madeley

further. We will continue to work with schools to deliver our aspiration that all schools in Dudley are good or outstanding."

The Ofsted ratings of secondary schools in Dudley also improved this year with 63 per cent of pupils now attending schools within the top two gradings, a rise of eight per cent. However, although the authority has moved up four places in the national table, it is still languishing in 123rd position for secondary schools.

Elsewhere in the Black Country, Walsall came bottom of the pile for primaries, with 71 per cent of children attending a good or outstanding school. The borough is now 143rd out of 150 local authorities.

Sandwell was 98th in the country on 83 per cent, Wolverhampton was 135th in the country on 74 per cent. For secondary schools Sandwell was the worst performing borough in the region.

Ban on secondhand tickets



Adele in concert — huge demand for Birmingham tickets

TICKETS for Adele's concerts bought on "secondary" websites will be cancelled and left worthless, says the company handling sales as it cracks down on touts charging up to £2,000.

The singer will be performing at Birmingham's Genting Arena on March 29 and 30 and now extra dates have been added for April 1 and 2.

But, in order to gain entry, ticket holders will be asked to present valid photo ID matching the name of the customer who placed the order printed on their ticket.

Each buyer must enter the concert at the same time as their guests and name changes will not be allowed.

The TicketMaster website says: "Failure to bring photo ID matching the name will result in refusal of entry to the show. There will be no exception."

The Ticket Factory, the national ticket agency that handles the 15,700-seater Genting Arena, says it plans to cancel all Adele tickets found for sale on secondary websites as opposed to authorised seller sites.

More than half a million people registered for the 57,000 tickets available.

Hospital admission figures rocket

THE number of patients being admitted to hospital has rocketed by more than 30,000 in the Black Country and Staffordshire over the last year.

Bosses say an increase is to blame — along with an over-reliance on Accident & Emergency departments by people who are not seriously ill or hurt.

The number of admissions across the Black Country and Staffordshire has increased at all NHS trusts except two — Sandwell and West Birmingham, and Walsall.

The total went from 548,828 in 2013-14 to 580,758 in the following year.

The Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust's increased from 109,068 to 117,043. Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust saw a rise from 106,396 to 117,178, while Staffordshire's went from 157,605 to 178,710.

But Sandwell's dropped from 107,499 to 103,361, and from 68,260 to 64,466 in Walsall.

Latest figures from the Health and Social Care Information Centre show 15.9 million admissions to NHS hospitals in England in 2014-15, equivalent to 43,500 per day.

This is 1,200 more per day on average than in 2013-145 and 10,400 more per day on average than 10 years ago in 2004-05.

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Trams return to Brum's city centre

TRAMS are up and running again in Birmingham city centre for the first time in over 60 years.

Passengers can now travel to a new stop in Bull Street, the first step in the opening of the £128 million city centre tramline extension.

Services began running to the stop last weekend, the first time trams have run in the city centre since they were withdrawn in 1953.

The modern Metro network previously went as far as Snow Hill.

Building of the Midland Metro extension into the main shopping area is being carried out by Centro, the delivery arm of the West Midlands Integrated Transport Authority (ITA).

Councillor John McNicholas, chairman of the ITA's Transport Delivery Committee, said it was a historic day both for Birmingham and the wider region.

"I am delighted that Metro services are now running into the city centre and with this first phase of Birmingham city centre now completed, we can look forward to the future work and tramlines that will be created, including new Brierley Hill and Wednesbury lines," he said.

"It's a huge boost for the region, with the amount of revenue coming back into the economy each year and the huge number of jobs that are being created in this phase alone."

Prime Minister hosts reception for NHS staff

HEALTH and care staff from Dudley attended a special reception hosted by Prime Minister David Cameron at 10 Downing Street.

The visit was part of a new partnership that aims to transform the future of the NHS.

The All Together Better Partnership will see health and social care in Dudley transformed, with a new model allowing patients to access specialist care out of hospital.

Thousands living in fear of eviction across the region

LANDLORDS in the Black Country filed more than 3,000 court claims to evict tenants over 12 months.

The Ministry of Justice figures show that people who live in rented properties in Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton are among the most at risk of being booted out of their homes in the West Midlands.

Homelessness charity Shelter has expressed fears for the increasing number of people in the region facing eviction.

Between October 1, 2014, and September 30 this year, landlords issued 1,075 repossession claims in Sandwell – a rate of one in every 49 rented homes in the borough.

During the same period there were 898 court applications in Wolverhampton (one in 50 properties) and 753 in Dudley (one in 54).

Those three Black Country boroughs ranked fourth, fifth and sixth respectively as the most risky areas in the West Midlands for renting homes.

Alison Mohammed, director of services at Shelter, said: "Each and every week hundreds of people in the region receive a notice through the door with the devastating news that they might lose their home."

Breaking

"We speak to parents every day who are desperately trying to keep a roof over their children's heads, but with rents soaring and housing support being slashed, many are finding themselves at breaking point."

Shelter has stated that more families are at risk of eviction due to cuts in housing benefit and a lack of affordable homes to buy.

Ms Mohammed added: "Over 2,400 children in the West Midlands will wake up homeless and in temporary accommodation this Christmas and, tragically, the situation looks set to get worse."

Slam Dunk festival move to the NEC

NEXT year's Slam Dunk festival will not take place in Wolverhampton after organisers were unable to find a suitable venue in the city.

The festival, which showcases the best of pop-punk and alt-rock draws more than 3,000 and has taken place at the Civic Hall for the past three years. But the closure of the venue for a £10.4 million refurbishment has forced organisers to move the 2016 event to Birmingham's NEC.

Festival founder and director, Ben Ray, said: "We desperately wanted to stay in Wolverhampton. We worked with the council to try and find a suitable venue, but unfortunately the only alternative option would not have been big enough to cater for the level of acts we have for next year."

Staging the event at the NEC will increase capacity to 40,000, with more than 40 bands across seven stages. Slam Dunk 2016 runs on May 29 and Panic! At The Disco are set to headline. See www.slamdunkmusic.com for details.

Youngsters gotta sing and gotta dance



Youngster from Neat Feet School of Dance with one of the musical numbers that delighted audiences at Brierley Hill

NEAT Feet School of Dance performed an all-singing all-dancing showcase at Brierley Hill Civic Hall with more than 100 young performers presenting sell-out performances of their show Magic of the Musicals.

Principal Lynne Rowell said: "The

talented cast worked extremely hard and had spent many weeks perfecting the well-known musical numbers, including excerpts from The Lion King, Mary Poppins, Mamma Mia, Les Misérables and Oliver! and many more."

Audience members were wowed by

the colourful costumes and creative choreography.

The Brierley Hill-based school of dance offers ballet for children and adults, tap, freestyle, contemporary or street dance. Contact Lynne Rowell on (01384) 423496.

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Fury over voting for our world champion

MORE than 75,000 people have signed the petitions, and the names still keep coming in. Don't be surprised if 100,000 people have joined the campaign by the end of the week.

And the campaign in question? More support for the flood victims in Cumbria? Tighter security on the Tube? People expressing a view on the bombing of Syria? Nah, the latest cause celebre of the Guardian-reading classes is whether people should be allowed to vote for world heavyweight boxing champion Tyson Fury in the BBC Sports Personality of the Year awards. Yes, that was keeping me awake at night too.

Now, I know it is well supported, but I've always considered the BBC Sports Personality to be one of the dullest fixtures on the sporting calendar. And having taken Wladimir Klitschko's world title, will Mr Fury really be bothered about a silly little trophy from Clare Balding? Previous winners include Sir Chris Hoy and Sir Steve Redgrave. So I can't wait for the Queen to say "arise, Sir Tyson."

Still, the people who have signed the petition are up in arms because Mr Fury has said fellow nominee Jessica Ennis-Hill "slaps up quite well" and "looks fit in a dress." Silly and coarse, maybe, but what were you expecting from a boxer? A spot of contemporary romantic poetry? A few quotes from Germaine Greer?

Let's leave the petitions to the big stuff, you know the things that affect people's lives. If you really feel strongly and don't want Mr Fury to take the prize, there is still something you can do. Something that will have a real impact on the final outcome. Vote for somebody else.

■ ■ ■

MUSEUMS and police stations are closing, libraries are being staffed by volunteers. Still, it's good to know that at least one area of local authority provision seems to be doing quite well.

Last year local authorities made a £693 million profit from parking charges.

No revenue, but profit. After all the running costs have been taken into consideration, after all the parking companies have been paid, and after all the street wardens dressed up like the Red Army have been paid. Good to know motorists aren't being treated like a cash cow or anything nasty like that.

Anyway, with all that extra jolly rolling in, you might think that the councils would be able to ease back on a few of the cutbacks. Apparently not. A spokesman for the Local Government Association said that any surplus was only spent on "essential transport projects".

Hmm. So, what, more bus lanes, which clog up our town centres? Cycle paths? Multi-coloured asphalt, speed cameras and road humps? Here's an idea. Drop all that nonsense, and give us free parking. In the places that we want it. Now that's what I call an essential transport project.

The emotional moment when Geoffrey Russon received the Legion D'Honneur from Yvonne

Geoffrey, seen with his medals alongside daughter-in-law Yvonne, back in May this year

Proud family's joy as Geoffrey is honoured

It was a dream come true for war veteran Geoffrey Russon to receive his Legion D'Honneur. DAVID COSGROVE reports

THE medal has been awarded to him but he says it's for everyone who didn't manage to come back home."

Those are the words of the proud daughter-in-law of a heroic D-Day veteran as he received the French government's highest accolade.

Emotions ran high for both Geoffrey Russon and his family when the 92-year-old was finally handed the Legion D'Honneur.

Both Geoffrey and his daughter-in-law Yvonne – who has defiantly fought his corner to try to ensure he received the medal before his death – were reduced to tears as she seemed to handed over the honour.

After months of canvassing, she was able to present Geoffrey, of Cradley Heath, with the medal he earned for his efforts seven decades ago.

Anxious

It was handed to her by the French Ambassador and she gave it to Geoffrey in Russells Hall Hospital, Dudley.

Yvonne, aged 50, said she was 'proud' to be able to give him the early Christmas present and ensure his anxious wait had a happy ending.

She said: "I went in with the box open for him and said 'this is yours, this is actually my medal'.

"He was absolutely shocked and he started crying, then I started crying.

"I think he's very thankful that he actually got to see the medal before he died, as he didn't think he would. The medal has been awarded to him but he says it's for everyone who didn't manage to come back home."

Yvonne, who lives in Stafford, added: "He didn't think he was going to get this medal –



Geoffrey in 1944, at around the time of the Normandy landings in the Second World War

he always thought he would die before he actually got it. He's an amazing man and I love him to bits.

"I'm so proud of him and so happy that I managed to do something for him."

After receiving the Legion D'Honneur, shocked Geoffrey – who belongs to the Birmingham branch of the Normandy Veterans – said: "I never thought I was going to get this."

The French government announced last summer it would recognise all surviving D-Day veterans with the medal, which is the country's highest honour.

Geoffrey applied for his medal soon after the announcement was made, but both he and Yvonne feared it would not arrive until it was

too late. Geoffrey was a 19-year-old driver in the Royal Army Service Corps during the Normandy offensive.

Yvonne emailed the French Embassy and other organisations in an effort to fast-track the applications for the medal.

Deserve

Her campaign was backed by Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP James Morris and Stafford MP Jeremy Lefroy.

Geoffrey's grandson Nik posted on Facebook: "My grandad, I am so proud to call you my grandad."

"You are my hero and my best friend you deserve everything you get. Words cannot de-



Geoffrey six weeks after joining up

scribe how proud I am to be called a Russon." Well-wishers have lined up to praise Geoffrey and state their delight he finally received the medal.

As the wait for the medal dragged on, house-bound Geoffrey voiced his disappointment earlier this year that the process was taking so long.

There are just six Veterans in his branch – down from 150 a few years ago, he said.

"I had a letter from the Ministry of Defence saying my application had been forwarded to the French government," Geoffrey said.

"I've no idea why it's taking so long. Some will never have this medal. It's wrong. They were quick enough to get us over there."

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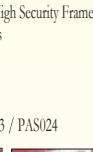
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I have a dream, like Martin Luther King

I recently created a stir and some rather hysterical headlines by using a quotation from Enoch Powell in a speech.

I want to make it absolutely clear that when I spoke about the dangers of uncontrolled immigration and open borders there was not the slightest element of racial discrimination involved. Indeed the vast majority of new arrivals to the UK in recent years were white.

Enoch Powell used the line "Those whom the gods wish to destroy they first make mad" back in 1968 and it's a powerful line. My use of it was purely

in reference to the madness of the UK surrendering its borders and being part of the EU project.

My speech was also critical of multiculturalism as a theory. This does not mean I object to having people from different cultures and backgrounds in the UK, quite the opposite. It means that I want all newcomers to associate with being British and add to the richness of our shared culture by joining in rather than living separately as happens all too often now.

I think it's best to sum up my views on society and equality with another

BILL ETHERIDGE MEP
Sedgley

Lanscaping better than old cinema

REGARDING the now lengthy debate about the future of the Dudley Hippodrome, have I lost the plot somewhere along the line. My memories of the place were only as a cinema, where we had the Odeon and the Plaza one on each side of the road and later as a bingo hall.

I am nearly 60 now so it's use as a venue is at least 50 years ago, the question is where were the Friends of the Hippodrome then, whilst it was already deteriorating to the point that these were the only uses it was worth then.

The place is an eyesore and needs to come down. I just hope the powers-that-be don't let this go on years and years, as with the saga of the mosque.

Pull it down now while costs are lower and as to its replacement, flat landscaping is as good as anything, certainly rather than what is there at the moment.

L PRIEST
Dudley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

Dudley Chronicle,
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EMAIL

dudley.chrons@
expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Council should not ignore covenant

DUDLEY Council's plans for the Hippodrome site after demolition appear to be running roughshod over the covenant placed on the site many years ago, which basically said that if the building was demolished, it would have to be replaced by a playhouse, theatre or a coaching inn.

We cannot understand why the council refuse to lease the building to the Friends group, to allow us the opportunity to apply for the funding that would be required to return the building to its former glory. If we were given this lease, it would allow us to proceed with our plans for the site, which have been laid out clearly in three stages: use of building before renovation to generate funds; use of building during renovation; projections for when the theatre is fully functioning.

If grants could not be acquired, which is unlikely, or the theatre could not pay for itself, all that the council would have lost is time because at least the asbestos would have been removed. The Friends group passionately believe that given the opportunity, we could provide the people of Dudley and the West Midlands with a top class theatre everyone could be proud of.

G DOWNING
Dudley

Hippodrome could house the museum

WHAT a controversial situation Dudley Council find themselves in over wanting to sell off the museum building and putting the magnificent artefacts and displays into storage, that will never see the light of day again.

This small museum has bookings for educational visits well into next year and a fame that is global with visits by every top geologist for decades.

Why not re-use the Hippodrome building and place the museum there? Visitor numbers would soar and bigger and better displays could be had. There are many visitors to the Black Country Living Museum, Dudley Zoo and Castle and Dudley Lime Caverns.

Such a move would save both the museum collections and the wonderful Hippodrome building.

The Hippodrome is both enough to house the museum and be an entertainment hub.

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Tuesday 29 December

Wednesday 30 December

Thursday 31 December

Friday 1 January

Christmas collection date

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No change

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Thursday 31 December

Saturday 2 January

Sunday 3 January

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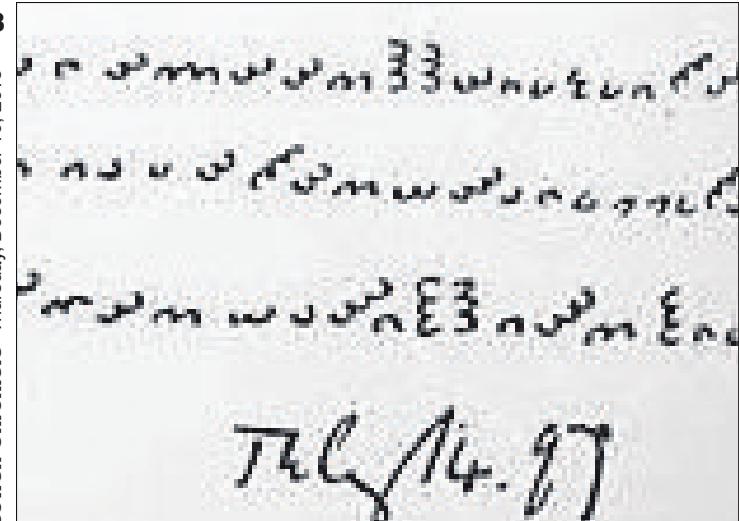
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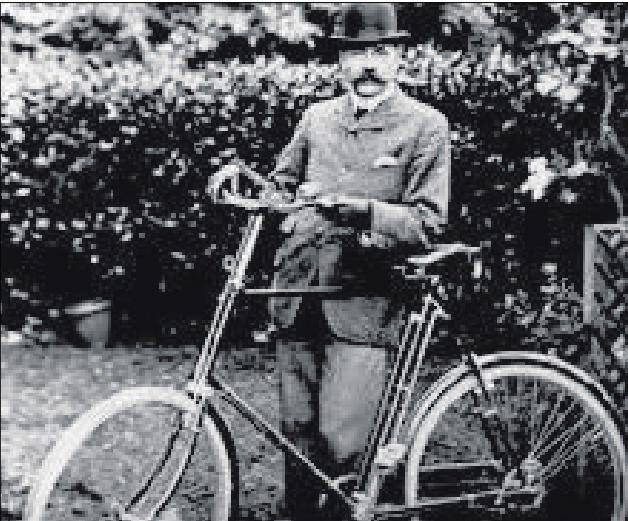
All collections will return to normal from Monday 4 January 2016



The Dorabella cipher, written by Elgar to Dora, but which remains unsolved



Composer Edward Elgar



Elgar on his Sunbeam bike on which he cycled many miles

Composer's secret Dorabella code remains an Enigma to this day

WHAT is the circle of connection between Edward Elgar, Sunbeam, the Wolves, a local girl named Dora Penny and the World War Two German cipher machine?

Dora Penny was born in 1874 at Swindon, near Trysull, the daughter of the Rev Alfred Penny. Her mother died just six days later, and she was raised by her grandmother.

Dora's father became a missionary in Melanesia for 12 years, and on his return to become rector of St Peter's in Wolverhampton, married Mary Baker who was a friend

MEMORY LANE

By Alec Brew

of the composer Elgar's wife, Caroline Alice. The Elgars came to visit the Rectory, which was on Waterloo Road right opposite Wolves Molineux ground, convenient for Elgar, as he was a fervent Wolves fan, and could stay with them when he came to a match.

He and Dora became great friends, despite her being 17 years his junior, and he sometimes took her to matches. They were both enthusiastic cyclists, on their Wolverhampton-built Sunbeams. Dora on at least

one occasion cycled by herself the 40 miles to Malvern to visit him, passing, on the way, the Sunbeam factory on the Penn Road, and near her birthplace at Swindon.

When Elgar published his Enigma Variations, the piece of music which made his name as a composer, he revealed that the 14 variations within it were each inspired by and based on, one of his circle of close friends, the 10th being named Dorabella, his nickname for Dora.

Elgar was a great enthusiast for codes and ciphers, and never revealed what the 'Enigma' was within the work, and musicologists and code breakers have argued what it might be, with the latest theory being Pi.

The first four notes are the scale degrees 3,1,4,2, in G Minor, or Pi, expressed as a decimal, and Pi represents the circumference of a circle. His circle of friends?

Elgar also compiled a personal code for Dora, the so-called Dorabella Cipher. To this day no-one has ever been able to decipher it. It consists of 87 characters spread over three lines, and appears to be made up from 24 symbols, each comprising one, two or three approximate semicircles oriented in one of eight directions.

It is said the German Enigma coding machine, invented originally as a civilian machine in the early 1920s, was named in honour of Elgar's love of ciphers.



Elgar's friend Dora Penny, aka Dorabella

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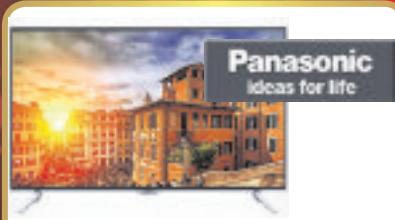
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Scooby BOO! Presley the giant scaredy-cat



All shook up – nervous Great Dane Presley, gets a reassuring cuddle from his owner Sian Barrett, from Oldbury

HE may be more than 6ft tall standing on his back legs but this Great Dane is a real-life Scooby Doo – cowering at the vacuum cleaner and running away from terriers.

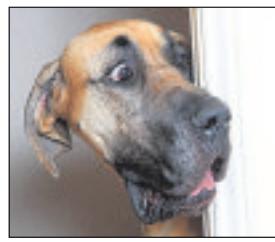
The slightest fright will send the two-year-old charging to owner Sian Barrett for a reassuring cuddle.

Sian, aged 46, from Oldbury, says 13-and-a-half stone Presley is terrified of smaller dogs and will run and hide when he's confronted by another pooch.

Sian said: "Presley is definitely a real-life Scooby Doo, he is afraid of everything. I was walking Presley in the park and he got scared off by a West Highland terrier, which is tiny compared to him."

"He is such a timid dog that I have to go out of the room whenever I get plastic bags out. He hates them. The rustling scares him. My husband calls him a massive wuss."

Sian, a mother-of-three who runs pet shop Langley Pet Supplies, says Presley, who she has shown at Crufts, has a kindly nature that always wins people over.



What's rustling! Presley gets a fright



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Celebrity guest helps to mark anniversary

Clent Gardening Club 2015

THE November meeting was a very special event in the club's calendar. It celebrated the 75th anniversary of its formation in 1940 by welcoming its first ever celebrity speaker in the form of Alys Fowler from King's Heath in Birmingham and of BBC Gardeners' World fame.

Alys commenced her talk with a brief introduction outlining her career with the BBC Gardeners' World programme, firstly working behind the scenes and more recently in front of camera.

Her talk, entitled 'How to have your garden and eat it' was the result of a Gardeners' World project whereby Alys attempted to exist for a six month period eating only produce grown in her own garden.

Alys has a typical urban terraced house with the usual long narrow garden and she illustrated her talk with a variety of photographs taken in her garden.

She showed before and after pictures as the garden was somewhat neglected when she took it over.

Her concept was to grow a whole variety of vegetables and edible plants both standard and the more exotic.

Rather than have a typical vegetable plot at the end of the garden, her vegetable plants mingle with a variety of flowers and other plants in her herbaceous borders and her photographs illustrated that this was a very attractive mix.

Her talk contained a plethora of advice on the cultivation of vegetables and she also explained that mixing flowers and vegetables significantly helped to combat pests and diseases.

Her talk was most entertaining and informative and was very well received by members.

A splendidly decorated birthday cake baked by club member Jean Riley was then cut by Alys together with president and longest serving member John Partington plus club chairman Martin Grange, after which members enjoyed a light buffet and a glass of wine or two to celebrate the milestone anniversary.

One lucky member went home with the

Christmas festivities in church
West Mids Federation

WEST Midlands Federation of Townswomen will be holding a Christmas celebration on Saturday, December 12, in St Thomas's Church, Market Street, Stourbridge, from 2.15pm.

The Mayoress of Dudley Jayne Walther and national chairman Margaret Key and her husband, Peter, have accepted an invitation to join them.

The programme will consist of a selection of seasonal readings and carols. Wollaston Guild Choir will present their selection of carols and Ann Tomlinson will be their soloist.

The Revd Andrew Sillis will conduct the service and organist Mr Callum Algar will also give a recital.

The public is most welcome to join in the service. Programmes will be available at the church door on the day at a cost of 50p which will include a hot drink and mince pie in the church hall following the service.

£500 raised for charity

Sedgley E TG



Celebrity speaker Alys Fowler cuts the celebration birthday cake with president and longest serving member John Partington and chairman Martin Grange

evening's raffle prize which was a copy of Alys' book written around her talk and which she happily signed.

At the end of the meeting the chairman wished everyone a happy Christmas, there being no December meeting, and reminded everyone that the next meeting on January 22 would be the club's AGM.

All are welcome to the meetings which are held at Clent Village Hall on the fourth Friday each month and anyone interested in either joining or just visiting the club can get further details by visiting the website at [https://clentgardeningclub.wordpress.com](http://clentgardeningclub.wordpress.com) or by contacting the chairman on 01562 883009/07917 184762.

SEDGLEY (E) Guild's craft section held their annual lunch gathering at the Lodge in Dudley. An enjoyable time was had by all.

The guild was also celebrating the success of the open day selling members' crafts. More than £500 was made, which will go towards Cancer Research.

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Golf day has raised £2,000

A FINANCIAL services company raised £2,200 at a golf day for a breast cancer charity.

Prosperity Wealth, based in St John's Road, Stourbridge, held its second annual charity golf day to raise funds for Breast Cancer Now.

Around 80 players, including staff and clients, took part in the sporting fundraiser at Bewdley Pines Golf Club and clubbed together to raise £2,200.

Breast Cancer Now is the UK's largest breast cancer charity and is dedicated to funding research into the disease.

Company director, Matt Bell, said: "This is a charity that is very close to our hearts and I'm delighted that we have been able to raise this fantastic amount of money to help them continue their work."

"It was a fantastic day and I would like to thank staff from Prosperity Wealth as well as our clients who gave up their time to help raise this money."

Village art display is picture perfect



Gail Belchamber, left and Jacqueline Bradley with their art

ARTISTS from Hagley made a colourful splash in their latest exhibition of original paintings with more than 200 pieces of work on show.

Hagley Art Club's annual exhibition, which is now in its 26th year, was opened by Viscount Cobham of Hagley Hall.

Around 400 visitors attended the exhibition over its three days, with exhibition organiser Hazel Gillard declaring the event a success.

"It was great, it was really successful," she said. "Lord Cobham opened it and he chose six paintings that were highly commended and the overall winner was Graham Madders."

"We sold some of the paintings and they were more the high-end ones. The sales were slightly down on previous years but because we sold the more expensive paintings we actually might have taken more money than we have in the past."

Visitors got the chance to view the exhibits, which were priced from £50 to £100, at Hagley's Community Centre in Worcester Road.

Volunteers needed to help the lonely

PEOPLE are being asked to give up their time to help those who are lonely or isolated.

Dudley Council is launching a befriending service to provide one-to-one and group assistance to housing tenants.

The scheme intends to help people gain a more positive outlook by becoming more involved in society. Volunteers will be asked to provide friendly, informal support.

Councillor Gaye Partridge, in charge of housing in the borough, said: "The festive season is a time when many of us make a pledge to undertake a New Year's resolution and often these relate to becoming more active in the local community. The befriending service offers individuals the opportunity to help housing tenants who need help, assistance and perhaps a friendly face."

Call 07827 873394 or email stayconnected@dudley.gov.uk for details of how to volunteer. Training will be provided.

London Midland win rail deal after a £13m pledge

LONDON Midland has won the contract to continue operating train services in the West Midlands.

It will see the company introduce a £13 million package of passenger improvements.

Free wi-fi will be provided on trains, extra services will be put on and additional car parking at busy stations will be introduced.

London Midland was awarded the Department for Transport (DfT) contract until October 2017.

It includes putting on two extra evening services every weekday from

London to the Trent Valley, providing an additional 2,300 seats from Euston each week and earlier services to central Birmingham on Sunday mornings from surrounding towns.

It is also to introduce new and upgraded ticket machines at selected stations, with click and collect and contactless payment options.

There will also be new targets to improve customer satisfaction and train punctuality.

London Midland said improvements worth £13m are planned over the next 18 months.

It will also have to meet tough new targets to improve train cleanliness,

install CCTV on cross-city Birmingham services and equip station staff with electronic tablets so better information is given to travellers.

The operator will also be required to introduce smart ticketing on trains, building on the existing Swift smart-card scheme.

London Midland managing director, Patrick Verwer, said: "Winning this contract is a great endorsement by the DfT of how London Midland is focused on improving our passengers' journeys. Since 2007 we have invested nearly £300 million in trains and stations. Over the last two years we have significantly improved performance."



MD Patrick Verwer

Sport manager among the best

A SPORT and physical activity manager has been named among the best in the country.

Dudley Council's Rachael Doyle was listed as one of the most inspiring physical activity professionals by industry giants UK Active at the national Active Training Awards.

Halesowen-based Rachael gained the accolade in recognition of her work over the last 12 months that has paved the way for an increased programme of sport and physical activities at council leisure centres and parks. They all now offer indoor and outdoor classes called 'functional fitness'.

Councillor Rachel Harris, cabinet member for health and wellbeing, said: "We are so proud of Rachael's achievements, as part of her 18 years' service to Dudley Council."

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12 Heartbreak and nostalgic themes

ALBUMS

by Leon Burakowski

NOSTALGIA runs through CeeLo Green's *Heart Blanche*, a slick set of songs from the Atlanta soul singer looking back to the 60s, 70s and 80s.

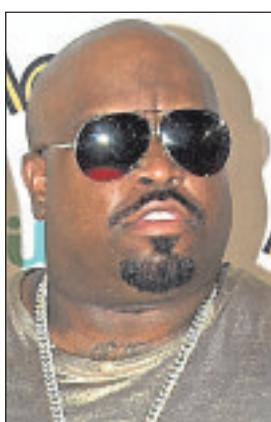
Est 1980s pays tribute to the likes of Duran Duran and Billy Idol, and sounds like them too, whilst the sultry southern soul vibe of Mother May I has the benefit of Mark Ronson's retro styled magic.

Work, a probable hit, has more than a hint of Cameo and Prince, and Tonight samples Music by John Miles, then borrows the Theme to Taxi for Sign Of The Times.

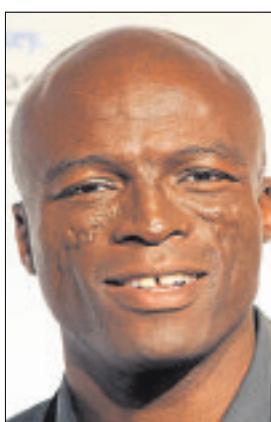
The gospel flavoured CeeLo Green Sings The Blues is a highlight, Music To My Soul and Race Against Time are both prime examples of the CeeLo brand of pop/R&B. However, the album hits a maudlin low with the track Robin Williams and peters out with forgettable songs, leaving a half-decent album.

The seventh album from Seal, entitled rather obviously 7, is a break-up album with songs that reflect the pain of a broken relationship, following the end of his marriage to supermodel Heidi Klum. That's pretty obvious with songs such as The Big Love Has Died and Half A Heart. But for all the rich, ragged-edged soulfulness of his vocals, the emotional level never reaches passionate. Immaculately produced by Trevor Horn, 7 nevertheless sounds stuck in the 1990s. Best of the bunch is the gently funky Monasow.

Stourport-born singer-songwriter Clifford T Ward, best known for his songs Gaye and Home Thoughts From Abroad, was plain Cliff Ward when he fronted swinging '60s out-



CeeLo Green draws on influences from the 1960s, '70s and '80s



The break-up of his marriage has influenced Seal's seventh album

fit The Secrets before finding fame in the '70s. Infatuation: Singles and Demos 1966-68 rescues the band's mid-60s output for CBS from obscurity. Whilst hardly in the category of lost classics, songs like She's Dangerous, I Know What Her Name Is and Keeping My Head Above Water are groovy in a Kinks/Hollies way. Path Through The Forest was in tune with the coming tide of psychedelia weirdness. The sleeve notes delve back into the Black Country, Brum and Kidderminster music scene of a half century ago.

There will be lots of musical nostalgia for those who watched TV in the '60s on the various artists album Escape In Time: Popular British Television Themes of the 1960s. These were the days when theme tunes were

bold and brassy, jazzy and dynamic, yet still somehow as thoroughly British as a brolly and a bowler hat.

The music was delivered by Johnny Dankworth, the John Barry Seven, Geoff Love & His Orchestra, guitar twanger Bert Weedon and King of the '60s TV theme Ron Grainer. The latter contributes the Steptoe & Son theme (called Old Ned), Comedy Playhouse (Happy Joe) and wonderfully stereotypically French style Maigret Theme.

Other favourites include Coronation Street (the theme was called Lancashire Blues), The Saint, Animal Magic, Juke Box Jury, the original The Avengers, What The Papers Say (still to be heard on BBC radio) and the tick tocking opening to Anthony Newley's surreal The Strange World of Gurney Slade.

Sunjay's blues are slick and cool

FOLK ALBUMS

by Danny Farragher

Sunjay
Black & Blues

SUNJAY, he now prefers just his first name, is an excellent bluesman.

For such a young musician he plays his guitar like he had it in the cradle instead of a rattle or cuddly toy.

The album was produced by veteran musician and producer Eddy Morton in his Stourbridge studio and was recorded in a day.

This could be behind its raw, unpolished feel which gives it an honesty, authenticity and almost an urgency.

Drop Down Mama is one Derby-born Sunjay has been taking around on his tours for some time and now the foot stomp is down on disc it still has the feel of a live performance.

What follows is the depression era blues, Nobody Wants To Know You When You Down & Out where Sunjay shows a side to his playing that is slicker than a latex clad tobogganist who has been covered in grease and sent down an oiled slipway.

He keeps the bluesy sound but gives it the kind of polish you associate with Jake Thackray. If you want to get a feel for his skill with the frets then the next track Duncan & Brady is as good an example as any.

Sunjay has a really smooth style of playing blues. His voice lends itself more to the serpentine sound rather than the dirty or gritty vocals of legends such as Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters or Lightnin' Hopkins. This album is a testimony to his talent.

He sounds cool, plays cool, looks cool so much so you almost expect a little light to come when he opens his guitar case.



Sunjay along with Eddy Morton laid down his new album in one day

Sam Kelly
Lost Boys

This is a superb album not just because of Sam Kelly's fantastic voice and ability to fill the songs he sings with life but also it reeks of folk, but it drips tradition and is the antithesis of so many albums which are trying to make folk sound more commercial.

Kelly's debut album opens with Jolly Waggoners where he shows you all you need is an instrument, a good voice, enthusiasm for what you are singing.

Banish Misfortune brings in the superb banjo picking of Jamie Francis, who wrote the track and whose style sounds very much like the precision playing of Gerry O'Connor.

Kelly's distinct voice which has that slight warble alongside Francis' picking gives the mountain sound of Six Miners some authenticity with the singer opening it up with a whole new freshness.

What has also makes this so enjoyable is the quality of talent Kelly has assembled around him which includes Ciaran Algar, Graham Coe, Lukas Drinkwater and Josh Franklin.

Mairearad & Anna
Best Day

If you could make a mink coat out of music then this selection from Scottish duo Mairearad Green and Anna Massie would fit the bill.

Green and Massie are like a two woman orchestra and this album gives them more than ample opportunity to show off their impressive multi-instrumental skills.

This is a chance to enjoy two of the most talented Scottish female folk musicians around.

Damien O'Kane
Areas of High Traffic

It's been five years since the talented honorary Yorkshireman produced a solo album. This is a very personal collection from Damien O'Kane and one where he is trying to give traditional songs, which mean a great deal to him, a modern slant.

The Colraine-born artist is a fine singer, songwriter, guitarist and music arranger.

His voice has that distinctive and traditional Gaelic quality, which has the drone feel of the uillean pipes.

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PHONE FOR BROCHURE

Style tips for Christmas

13

Halesowen Chronicle Thursday, December 10, 2015



Advice to help you dream of a white Christmas

NEVER mind decking the halls – it's all about the Christmas tree, isn't it?

Whether you favour a 'can-you-believe-it's-not-real?' artificial one or always opt for

the genuine article, whose fragrant scent (and needles) will fill the house, it's the decorations that say most about your taste and family history - from hand-me-down baubles to childhood creations.

"This year, people seem determined to

want their tree to be the biggest they can fit in and afford, and they also have a very good idea of what colour or style theme they want to follow," says Craig Roman, home and garden styling expert at Dobbies Garden Centres. "They're very specific about

the look they want to achieve, and we have three key looks this year – full-on traditional, with lots of red and gold; a countryside feel, featuring creatures great and small; or the dazzling snowy white tree, embellished with silver or gold touches."

The picture above aims to capture the atmosphere of a winter wood where snow-laden trees sparkle and shimmer in the light.

There are three more pages inside. Whichever look you choose, make it tree-mendous...

Five ways you can cut down your water usage

IF your home has a water meter, you're probably used to conserving water, but are you doing as much as you could?

1. About a third of the water we use at home is for flushing the loo, but you can save a lot by only flushing when there's something solid to flush away. If this doesn't appeal, you can restrict the amount of water used for each flush by fitting a water-saving loo, such as a dual-flush one that has a big and a little flush. You can also put something (a brick, or a plastic bag designed for the job – some water companies provide these free) in the cistern, so it doesn't use as much water to flush.



2. Taking a shower uses around two-thirds less water than taking a bath, but this is providing you're only in the shower for a few minutes and it's not a power shower – power showers can use more water than a bath. You'll save most water by fitting a flow-restricting shower or an aerating shower head. These use less water per minute and shouldn't leave you showering in a dribble. Mira Showers' Eco showers, for example, use flow regulators to limit the maximum flow of water, while their Eco shower heads use aerating technology to create the sensation of a normal flow using a lot less water (see www.mirashowers.co.uk).

3. If you have a dripping tap, fix it quickly because it will soon waste litres of water. Often the tap just needs a new washer, which isn't hard to fit. You can also save water by fitting flow restrictors or regulators to your home's taps, or tap inserts that aerate the water.

4. One of the best ways to save water is to install a grey-water recycling system. This typically takes waste water from the bath, shower and basin (and sometimes other waste water) and uses it for the loo and outside tap. There are various ways to do this, some of which are expensive, but it can be as straightforward as fitting a waste-pipe splitter to separate the water from your bathroom's loo from the rooms' other waste water.

5. In the garden, rainwater can be collected in a water butt by connecting it to a downpipe, which is a fairly simple DIY job. This makes watering the garden easier. A more elaborate version of this is a rainwater harvesting system. There are different versions, but it's often a system that collects rain from the guttering and pumps it to where it's needed. More than half of the mains water we use at home could be replaced by rainwater in this way, so it could make a big difference.



PRODUCT OF THE WEEK

If you know someone who has a lot of painting to do, a bells-and-whistles roller set would make a cracking Christmas gift. Screwfix has a couple of great-value Harris ones that are currently on offer. Harris' The Really Big Roller Box (currently £23.99, Screwfix, www.screwfix.com) contains all sorts of decorating goodies, including different roller frames and sleeves (the 7in ones are excellent for medium-sized jobs), roller trays, an extension pole for painting ceilings, a useful tray lid and a disposable tray liner.

This set is a fantastic starter kit, as is the Harris Decorators Kit 14 Piece Set (£14.99, Screwfix). This also contains various roller frames and sleeves that produce a good finish, but the best thing about it is the large paint scuttle. Unlike many scuttles, this one has a lid, so you can safely leave paint in it overnight and continue painting the next day, which is really useful. The scuttle's also big enough to be used to mix and store paint in if you're creating your own wall or ceiling colour – simple but brilliant.

HOW-TO TIP

If you discover a frozen pipe at home this winter, act quickly before it bursts. To defrost it, first check that it hasn't split and that the fittings haven't been pushed apart, then apply heat gently along the length of the pipe using a hairdryer – if the pipe leads to a tap, make sure it's turned on. Call in a plumber immediately if you're not confident you can deal with this yourself.

Fill your home with the warm scent of Christmas

A FESTIVE fragrance works wonders for conjuring the Christmas spirit.

The power of scent is well-known – it can turn back time, bring back memories and transport us to other worlds in a nanosecond, which probably explains why more and more of us are embracing home fragrances. Especially at Christmas time, when we feel nostalgic as well as merry.

The season has its characteristic scents, from fir trees and woodsmoke to mince pies and mulled wine – and just a hint of those conjured by the magic of a room spray, candle or diffuser, can evoke the warm, welcoming spirit of the festive season.

There are a myriad more increasingly sophisticated scents too, which can appeal individually and say as much about our style and taste as a personal fragrance.

"This winter, fragrance is all about the beauty of the outdoors, and those who want to be reminded of all their best childhood memories of the season need look no further than the enchantingly beautiful scents conjuring crisp frosted pines, fir tree, winter citrus, holly, ivy and soft white musk notes, representing the first snowfall of winter," says Roz Wicks, marketing manager at fragrance house, Symrise.

"For some, nothing makes the season like the smell of spice and there's an increased focus on food inspired scents this year – brambleberries, cranberries, clementines, cloves, gingerbread, roasted chestnuts, cinnamon, ginger, tonka beans and cardamom. These will fill the house with warmth and cheer on a cold, dark winter's eve."

Those seeking glamorous scents for late-night winter soirees could, she suggests, embrace warm oriental notes to conjure a party atmosphere: rich frankincense, sweet myrrh, velvet rose, sandalwood, cedar and golden amber.

Read on to find out how you can get the right scent for every seasonal occasion, whether to soothe stress as you battle with the preparations, conjure festive atmosphere or simply ramp up the party spirit...

WICK WISDOM

Use a candle snuffer when extinguishing candles. This avoids movement in the wick and debris falling into the melted wax which will cause smoke when you relight. Ensure wicks are trimmed to a maximum length of 5mm before lighting and the wax is clear of debris or dust. Keep a candle on a flat surface and not near draughts, which can cause flickering and uneven burn. Make sure you burn a candle long enough so the wax fully pools across the surface, but no longer than four hours at a time.

ADVENT COUNTDOWN

Make each day in the lead up to Christmas special, with a fragrance of its own. Yankee Candle's Advent House In The Snow, £27.99, features a tea light for every day in one of seven seasonal scents, including spiced orange, snowflake cookie and winter glow, as well as a Christmas Eve votive. If you'd like to specifically match your fragrance to your personality, the company's Fragrance Finder app can help you refine your choice (yankeecandles.co.uk).

STRESS SOOTHERS

For all its charm, the pressures of Christmas preparation can leave us feeling frazzled rather than festive – so call for the scent soothers! AromaWorks has four designed to appeal to the senses: Nurture to relax, Serenity to restore, Inspire to bring balance, and Soulful to calm jangled nerves, all available in their Box Of Signature 4 set, £24.

Running a hot bath, dimming the lights and lying back to soak up the scent of an Elemis Spa Light Candle, £25, which aims to bring peace with vanilla, and then re-energise with orange and cinnamon, is a great stress-buster. For an exotic take on tranquillity, Japanese Takahashi Hiroko has an innovative new range of four fragrances, presented in bone china containers with striking monochrome designs. Ichi is redolent of a rain-refreshed landscape with notes of lily of the valley, jasmine and vetiver. Diffusers, £75 each, Unique & Unity.

COSY NIGHTS

Sitting by the fire writing shopping lists – or, more importantly, Santa requests – is essential, and the right scent could help you make light work of the task. "My favourite fragrance for this time of year is a blend of



The pine and eucalyptus candle from Jo Malone has a fragrance reminiscent of a stroll in winter woodland



TV presenter Amanda Lamb is working with Air Wick Life Scents

A selection of pillar candles from The White Company

clementines, mulled wine and firewood, in Mulled Wine By The Fire," says TV presenter Amanda Lamb, Air Wick Life Scents Mulled Wine By The Fire reed diffuser, £4, Asda.

Alternatively, step in from the cold and be warmed by The White Company's Winter scent, which blends notes of cinnamon and clove with a dash of fresh orange, for a traditional aroma. Pillar candles from £25.

WOODLAND WALKS

"Just like a favourite perfume, scented candles can transport us back in time and bring back wonderful memories, with many people using a favourite seasonal scent year after year," says Laura Lee, florist and event specialist who's helped Kenneth Turner – the fragrance-maker beloved by celebrities including the Prince of Wales, Vanessa Redgrave and Sting – to create three new seasonal scents: Masquerade, Winter Berries and Midwinter, from £42 each.

"Midwinter's based on a walk on Boxing Day through trees laden with lime-green mistletoe – so it includes the fragrance of that with pine, rosemary and thyme, and sparkling musks."

For a bright, bracing aroma also reminiscent of a stroll in winter woodland, Jo Malone's Pine & Eucalyptus Home Candle, £42, hits all the right notes.

MAN UP

Home fragrance doesn't have to be a girly pleasure nowadays, as there are plenty of scents to appeal to the boys.

The tangy-sweet odour of old books, beeswax polish and wood-paneling is conjured up for a 'library' scent using plum, peach, leather, violet and patchouli in Bibliothèque by Byredo. A limited-edition Room Spray, £60. Liberty. "It's a timeless scent, unique and quite addictive," says Byredo founder, Ben Gorham.

Alternatively, a Havana Candle, from £20, Karma Feeling, combines the macho scent of Cuban tobacco and oak.

PARTY SPARKLE

Partying and socialising with family and friends is all part of the fun of the season.

Before you pop a cork, instantly conjure a party atmosphere with a Champagne Rosé Candle, £25, Voluspa, which has notes of brut rosé Champagne, chilled and poured over cassis berries and edible white rose petals.

The aptly-named Cocktail Gardener candle range from Amazon has four fragrances, £30 each, created by mixologist, Lottie Muir.

"These candles are inspired by years of experimenting with the intense aroma and flavour of plants to capture the joy of nature in a glass," she says. Bloody Rosemary has

uplifting notes of rosemary, grapefruit and oak, while Woodland Martini is a velvety mix of sage, Douglas fir needles, cedar and musk.

DIVINE DINING

Enhance a gourmet feast with Diptyque's Liquidambar, from £28, which is spiced with nutmeg and cinnamon, then blended with muscovado sugar for a sweet aroma. Meanwhile, Sainsbury's Redcurrant And Cassis Cloche Candle, £15, is a rich fruity blend of crushed redcurrants, sweetened with pomegranate and plum.

FLOWER POWER

Heady floral fragrance adds a hint of luxury and evokes rooms filled with bouquets. "Perfume is said to complete a woman's outfit, and home fragrance completes a home, because it should be tailored to the style and personality of the owner," says Leo Gibbon, co-founder of new home fragrance company, IIUVO. Its Ajon candle, £50, has a scent inspired by Gibbon's mother's floristry workshop and contains a blend of orange blossom, jasmine, rose and the essence of a classic gardenia (available direct from the company or from Liberty).

For a budget-friendly option, check out the floral Leafy & Lovely Box Candle, currently reduced from £6 to £4, Superdrug.



Keep on top of fallen leaves that are collecting on the ground

Picking, planting and then planning for next season

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

1. Order new dahlia plants and tubers for delivery next year

2. Complete all picking of apples and pears

3. Finish planting winter containers as soon as possible to give plants a chance to get established

4. If you're emptying old compost out of pots and into the garden, check for vine weevil before you do so and if you see any, dispose of the old compost elsewhere

5. Take hardwood cuttings from hardy climbers such as jasmine and honeysuckle

6. Pick young spinach leaves, putting cloches over the plants during the winter for extra protection

7. Plant Japanese onion sets if not yet done

8. Net winter brassicas if you have a problem with pigeons or rabbits

9. Cut and store Dutch white cabbages, which aren't hardy

10. Keep picking up leaves that have fallen

BEST OF THE BUNCH - Viburnum

THESE colourful, scented shrubs are invaluable over the winter and in spring, providing backdrops for other plants when they are in flower and seasonal interest of their own at other times.

For large borders, V. x bodnantense 'Charles Lamont' is a must-have, its delicate pink flowers emitting a delicious scent from early winter to mid-spring. This upright shrub is ideally planted next to a sheltered path or entrance and is a valuable source of nectar for pollinating insects. Other good varieties include V. daviddii, with white spring flowers followed by metallic-looking, turquoise blue fruits on orange-red stalks.

Tree week flies flag for foliage and form

AS National Tree Week celebrates its 40th anniversary, Hannah Stephenson selects five of the best trees for small gardens.

If any of you think that you can only plant a tree if you have a large garden, think again.

There's a plethora of trees out there, which are compact, but look amazing as stand-alone features in a small space, providing colour, texture and form to a smaller garden.

So don't delay, do your bit for National Tree Week, the UK's largest tree festival, and plant a tree which won't take up too much of your garden space, but will make a spectacular difference. Here are some of the best:

Amelanchier: These unsung heroes have started to become popular at the large horticultural shows in recent years and among the most gorgeous is A. x grandiflora 'Ballerina', which produces profuse white spring flowers before the bronze tinted young leaves emerge. A. lamarckii, the snowy mespilus, is often grown as a multi-stemmed type but can be trained as a light standard. Its elegant branches carry copper-coloured leaves in spring at the same time as starry white flowers, while in autumn the small oval leaves colour brilliantly.



Japanese Flowering Cherry (Prunus Shogatsu): This is a stunning stand-alone specimen which enjoys a long season of interest, from its spring blossom of double pink-and-white flowers to its bronze leaves which turn fiery red throughout autumn. It prefers a sunny spot with moist, well-drained soil. The blossom on flowering cherries can be a fleeting delight, but the slim, upright Prunus 'Amanogawa' is ideal for a narrow garden, which takes up little space and is adorned with double pale pink flowers in mid spring.

Flowering dogwood: These are ideal small trees if you have neutral to acid soil. Among the finest of the conical types is Cornus florida f. rubra, which bears beautiful pink blooms in early summer followed by rich autumn leaves. Other showstoppers include C. florida 'Cherokee Chief', which produces deep rose-red bracts, and C. 'Porlock', which displays flame-coloured autumn hues from some of its leaves enhanced by the profusion of strawberry-like fruits which hang from the branches. Flowering dogwoods do best in well-drained but fertile soil rich in organic matter.

Acer palmatum: The amazing autumnal foliage of the Japanese maple, along with its elegant architectural structure, cannot fail to impress and there are plenty of compact types which are suitable for the small garden, whether planted in the ground or in large pots. Acer palmatum 'Bloodgood' will be as home in both, its rich red-purple foliage providing a striking contrast to other plants from spring through to autumn. If you want a variety which will hang gracefully over water, go for A. palmatum var. dissectum, a type with finely cut foliage which is broader spreading, growing 2m high by 3m wide. Acer generally prefer slightly acid soil, so if you are planting them in a pot add some ericaceous compost. They are slow-growing and if you plant them in pots their growth will be slower still.

Sorbus: Also known as rowans, these trees are among the best for a small garden, providing white spring flowers, masses of autumn berries and divided foliage which often changes colour in autumn. S. aucuparia 'Fastigiata' has a tight, tidy shape and offers white flowers followed by deep red berries and brilliant autumn foliage, while S. 'Joseph Rock' produces yellow fruits and fiery-red and orange foliage in autumn. These trees are ideal for urban gardens as they are pollution tolerant and will withstand extremes of heat and cold. They prefer fertile, non-chalky soil in sun or light shade.

The Tree Council, the charity which organises National Tree Week, advises those buying a tree to check that it has been grown in the UK.

Pauline Buchanan Black, director, says: "To continue enjoying trees, we need to lessen the risk of new tree diseases being imported on plants that have been growing in other countries."

"If everyone buying a tree makes a point of asking the nursery or garden centre for stock that's been produced within the UK, the message will be heard."

National Tree Week runs until Sunday. For details, visit www.treecouncil.org.uk

Making the most of all you may have left over

By Ross Underwood

IT must finally be winter despite not a flake of snow having fallen here and barely a frost to speak of.

I say this because I am being tempted from the garden and into the kitchen by the come hither eyes of a certain luscious TV cook.

Though in my defence the excitement of watching eggs being whisked is not the only reason I have come in from the wind and rain.

I have been trying out various pumpkin recipes to make use of those I had not been able to give away at Halloween.

Gluts are part of vegetable and fruit growing.

In the summer it is impossible to eat all the raspberries the canes produce, in the autumn plums and damsons often hang shrivelled upon the trees.

There are remedies and my freezer plays a big role.

Some fruits keep better than others.

Apples can be stored well and keep their freshness. We store ours in plastic stacking plates on a sheet of newspaper in an unheated shed. As long as the air can get around them most varieties will keep well. Never store any that are visibly bruised or damaged as they will only rot and check those you do store regularly, turning often. Once one goes mouldy it quickly spreads to the whole lot.

Wonderful

You don't need crates or trays, apples and pears can be stored in plastic bags tied loosely so that the air can still get in and as long as they are not put away wet they will keep perfectly well.

There are some varietal differences which can affect how long something will keep.

'Discovery' is a wonderful eating apple but it won't keep anywhere near as long as 'Winter Gem'.

Variety plays an important role in flavour.

Have you ever wondered why 'Granny Smith' and 'Golden Delicious' are almost uniformly awful for eating? They were bred commercially to be easy to pack and transport and have a long shelf life hence the hard waxy skin on 'Granny Smith'.

Anyhow, back to pumpkins.

When I went into the greenhouse I found that one of the three I had saved had collapsed like a flat tyre and I was unable to contemplate the other two succumbing to the same fate.

I only grew three plants this year but pumpkins are huge growers and make excellent ground cover and can be prolific producers anyway.

Despite not being too conscientious about turning them to stop them being flattened on one side the three I had saved were perfectly round and golden orange in colour. Too good to waste!

The obvious answer was soup but they



Apples can be stored in newspaper or loosely tied plastic bags, but some varieties keep better than others



Parsnips can also be stored successfully



Pumpkin needs plenty of flavour when being cooked

are fairly large specimens and there is the issue of having too much of a good thing.

I also tried pumpkin risotto, adding about 1/4 of chopped pumpkin to a pan and gently frying in some stock until it softened the adding that mixture plus the rest of the stock to a pan of rice until everything had softened and the stock had been absorbed. This plus cheese and a little wine went down a treat!

My favourite however is pumpkin fondue which uses the whole pumpkin at once.

After cutting off the top and scooping out the seeds I fill the empty space with cheese,

cream and a little wine and bake in the oven until everything is bubbling and the pumpkin has softened.

Then it's a matter of eating it with bread dipped in or a long spoon carving out flesh as well as filling! This is a wonderfully convivial way to eat and worthy perhaps of putting before my raven-haired inspiration were she ever to call!

All of the above recipes can be improved with a liberal sprinkling of smoked paprika which adds heat without adding spice. Pumpkin has to be given a flavour as it does not have much of its own.

What better way to enjoy your pumpkins than washing them down with a glass of sherry or damson gin.

The trick is patience which luckily is free of charge. Simply fill a jar with a tight fitting lid with fruit and gin. Add sugar and keep adding it every week when you should also give it a stir. Do this for at least three months then sieve out the stones, flesh and skin from the fruit.

Well that's it, I'm off to watch my TV chef produce something wonderful from her pantry... well there are worse ways of keeping warm!



Many senior people will resort to cost-saving measures this winter

Over-50s worried by cost of heating

IT'S not the cost of Christmas, it's the cost of heating their home that's worrying the over-50s.

As temperatures take a dip, many over-50s are taking desperate measures in order to meet the cost of heating their home this winter. One in five said they will struggle to pay their bills and nearly one in ten (nine per cent) said they would have to go to bed earlier and get up later in order to avoid putting their heating on.

Compared to the same period last year, energy prices have remained relatively stable. However, despite this over half of over-50s are concerned about the cost of energy this winter, with those in the North East, Scotland and Wales showing the most concern.

When asked what other measures some would have to take to ensure they can afford to keep warm in winter, three in five over-50s said they would have to wear extra clothing or only put the heating on at certain times of the day (61 per cent and 60 per cent respectively). Almost a third (30 per cent) said that they would not heat as many rooms and for a shocking one in eight, parts of their homes will become no-go areas once the chill sets in.

Whilst one in ten would go to bed earlier and get up later, one in ten also said that they would only put their heating on as a last resort.

Lisa Harris, head of communications for Saga, said "Keeping warm in winter is not a luxury, it's essential for many to keep fit and well. People shouldn't be afraid of putting the heating on, but one in ten to admit that they would only put their heating on as a last resort. However, there are often lots of relatively simple measures that people can take to help keep control of their energy bills."

As well as getting on to the cheapest tariff possible, Saga publishing have some tips for helping people find ways in which they can save energy and cut bills.

1. A massive 20 per cent of your home's heat escapes through cracks and gaps around doors and windows. Use draught excluders, well-lined curtains and make sure windows are properly sealed.

2. Setting your central heating timer correctly is a simple way to save energy. Fix the heating to come on for a couple of hours when you wake up to make those chilly morning showers much more bearable, and then for a couple of hours again in the evening.

Don't waste money by having the heating on during the day when no-one is reaping the benefits.

3. Loft insulation is effective for at least 40 years and it can save you up to £250 on your energy bills each year. In a bungalow, it is even more essential that you install loft insulation as the larger surface area of the roof, compared to a house, will mean that heat can escape at a quicker rate. As a bungalow is a single-floor home, it would be a good idea to perhaps light a fire rather than putting your central heating on, as the rooms will heat up quicker.

4. Insulating your walls properly can save you up to £460 a year. Approximately a third of all heat lost in an uninsulated home is through the walls, therefore it is important to ensure you install the correct type of wall insulation. Depending on the type of walls you have, cavity wall insulation or internal/external wall insulation will help reduce heat loss.

5. The Energy Saving Trust estimates we can save a collective £1.7 billion a year by switching electrical items off. Turn off lights, TVs and phone chargers. Three quarters of those with a spare TV keep it on standby. Most importantly, don't think standby does the job. Off means off.

Keep your property safe against winter weather

AS the winter weather steps up a notch, we present some simple steps for protecting your abode from the elements.

The cold is coming, and homeowners in the UK are being encouraged to protect their properties and prepare for what looks set to be a grim winter – especially if this month's recent storms are anything to go by!

Insurance firms are already advising customers on how to shield their properties from the disruptive weather – not least by checking the type of policy and provider they currently have in place.

Once you have the correct home insurance, with adequate building and contents cover, follow this easy guide to caring for your estate pre-storm...

CHECK LIST

It's worth checking your property and its immediate surroundings for obvious, preventable risks.

If any home and garden improvements need tending to, now is the time to do the work.

This could include falling roof tiles, broken fences and crumbling brickwork – things which may appear harmless at first glance, but could end up costing more post-storm, and pose harm to your home and family.

KEEP IT SEALED

During high winds, speed can fluctuate and place huge pressure on every element of the building.

To avoid this, or at the very least minimise the hazards it can cause, homeowners should look to keep their property well-sealed externally.

Inspect all exterior corners and outdoor water faucets, and seal any gaps in outer walls or foundations with foam or caulk, to prevent cold air and water entering the home.

UP ON THE ROOF

The roof is one of the most exposed parts of a home, so it goes without saying it needs to be secured properly during stormy conditions.

Steer clear of walking across the roof yourself (especially in adverse weather), and instead, inspect it from the ground or inside of the loft.

If you spot mould, outside light coming through, rusted nails, sagging material, loose sheathing or signs of leaking, call in a specialist to get it checked properly and sorted out. Damaged guttering must be considered too.

A REAL PANE

When gale-force winds are howling outside and the windows are rattling, it's easy to worry they'll combust at any given moment.

Realistically, if you draughtproof your windows and doors with a sealant, secure entry doors with a hinge and locks, and consider installing solid or hollow metal doors, it's unlikely you'll experience extensive damage – if any. If extreme conditions ensue and flying debris becomes an issue, protect the windows and any French doors with some plywood.



Preparing for the worst of winter weather, including checking your insurance policy, can save you a lot of money



We could be in for more dramatic storms this winter



There are many ways to minimise storm damage

GARDEN GUSTO

It's a strange sight when you spot a large trampoline suddenly lift off the ground and fly through the air and over your neighbour's fence, not to mention the damage

such things can cause when they become airborne. So avoid the inevitable by ensuring all garden furniture – including barbecues, toys and anything else that could be launched into the air – is either firmly

secured or stored away. Trim back any suspect trees and park your car out of their path or, if possible, in a garage. Finally, secure garage doors and be sure yours is strong enough to withstand high winds.



Windows will withstand high winds if sealed properly



It's worth checking your roof for faults

fast theticket



Hairspray

Preview – Page 19



**NATIVE
MONSTER**

Entertainment Unleashed



Chuckle time!

Peter Pan panto is here
See Page 19

For full listings see **Express & Star** every Friday

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Stereophonics

Friday, 7.30pm

Genting Arena, B'ham

Welsh rockers Stereophonics played a 16-arena sell-out tour in 2013 following the release of their album *Graffiti On The Train*. And now they're back for more. Visit www.gentingarena.co.uk

POP & ROCK**Jools Holland & His Rhythm & Blues Orchestra**

Thu at 7.30pm - 10pm, £36
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 780 3333

The Beat

Sat at 7pm, £17
Wolverhampton Slade Rooms, WV1 1RQ. 0870 320 7000

Don Broco

Sat at 7pm, £15
Wolverhampton Wulfrun Hall, WV1 1RQ. 0870 320 7000

Kick Up The 80s: 80s Tribute

Fri at 8pm, Sat at 8pm, £8 - £9.50
The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 1JN. Call 01384 397177

The Overtones

Fri at 7pm, £21.50 - £38.50
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 780 3333

Simply Red: Reformed! 2015 World Tour

Sun at 6pm, Tue at 6pm, £45 - £50
Genting Arena, Birmingham, B40 1NT. Call 0121 780 4141

Clutch - SOLD OUT

Fri at 7pm, £18
Wolverhampton Wulfrun Hall, WV1 1RQ. Call 0870 320 7000

Madonna: Rebel Heart Tour

Wed at 8pm, £175
Barclaycard Arena, Birmingham, B1 2AA. Call 0121 780 4141

The Bootleg Beatles

Fri at 7.30pm, £28.50 - £29.50
Wolverhampton Civic Hall, WV1 1RQ. Call 0870 320 7000

Tue at 7.30pm - 10pm, £28.50 - £29.50
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 780 3333

Def Leppard & Whitesnake

Sat at 6.45pm, £45.70
Genting Arena, Birmingham, B40 1NT. Call 0121 780 4141

The Selecter

Sun at 7pm, £16.50
O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

Into The Shadows: Shadows Tribute

Sat at 7.30pm, £10 - £15
Stafford Gatehouse Theatre, ST16 2LT. Call 01785 254653

The Darkness

Fri at 6pm, £25
O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

The Sex Pissed Dolls

Sun at 7.30pm, £12
The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 1JN. Call 01384 397177

The Charltons

Sat at 7pm, £27.50
O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

Madonna

Wednesday, 8pm

Barclaycard Arena, B'ham

The Rebel Heart Tour follows the March release of the Rebel Heart album, and performances at the Grammys and The Brits. Stars don't come any bigger than Madge. Visit www.barclaycardarena.co.uk

Ken Dodd

Sunday, 7pm

Civic Hall, W'ton

Celebrating 60 years in the business, Ken returns to the Civic Hall - one of his favourite venues. Even after all this time Doddy remains one of Britain's funniest comedians. Visit www.wolvscivic.co.uk

Dynamo

Until Sunday

Barclaycard Arena, B'ham

Dynamo has established himself as one of the world's most loved and popular magicians. His five-night residency in Birmingham started on Wednesday. Visit www.barclaycardarena.co.uk

FOLK & ACOUSTIC**Slaves**

Wed at 7pm - 11pm, £13.50
The Institute, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 6DY. Call 0121 643 0428

Stereophonics

Fri at 7.30pm, £33.20 - £48.20
Genting Arena, Birmingham, B40 1NT. Call 0121 780 4141

Slade: Classic Hits

Thu at 9.45pm,
The Robin 2, Bilston, WV14 7LJ. Call 01902 401211

Iain Mackenzie And Georgina Jackson: Frank Sinatra: Tribute

Sat at 7.30pm - 10pm, £12.50 - £37.50
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 780 3333

Joe Carnall Jnr

Thu at 7pm - 10pm,
The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 1JN. Call 01384 397177

Talon: Eagles Tribute

Sat at 7.30pm,
The Robin 2 Hotel, Bilston, WV14 7LJ. Call 01902 401211

Sun at 7.30pm,

Prince Of Wales Centre, Cannock, WS11 1DE. Call 01543 578762

Black Star Riders

Thu at 7pm,
Wolverhampton Wulfrun Hall, WV1 1RQ. Call 0870 320 7000

Peter Cox & Richard Drummie

Fri at 7.30pm,
The Robin 2, Bilston, WV14 7LJ. Call 01902 401211

The Space Hoppers

Fri at 8pm,
Katie Fitzgerald's, Wollaston, Stourbridge, DY8 3TB. Call 01384 374410

The Wonder Stuff

Thu at 7pm,
O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

The Stubble Brothers

Thu at 12am,
Katie Fitzgerald's, Wollaston, Stourbridge, DY8 3TB. Call 01384 374410

Space

Fri at 7pm, £14
Wolverhampton Slade Rooms, WV1 1RQ. 0870 320 7000

The Delray Rockets

Sun at 8pm, Free
The Grapes, Stafford, ST16 2HZ. Call 07989 174631

Tim Jenks - 'Realms of Glory'

Sun at 7.30pm
Holy Trinity Church, Heath Town, Wolverhampton. Call 01902 754487

Tim Jenks - 'Unplugged'

Wed at 8pm
Claregate Pub, Wolverhampton, WV6 9ED. Call 01902 754761

Fallout

Fri at 10pm, £3-£5
The Grapes, Stafford, ST16 2HZ. Call 07989 174631

Club Berlin

Sat at 8pm
Knight's Quest, Rowley Regis B65 0EE. Call 0121 561 5599

The Beatles tribute Help!

Sat at 8pm, £6/£8
Arena Aldridge, Walsall, WS9 8QR. Call 0844 884 2920

Wabash Jazz Four

Sun at 1pm
Albrighton Sports and Social Club, WV7 3QT. Call 01902 756158

CLASSICAL & OTHER MUSIC**The Birmingham Canoldir Male Choir Spirit Of Christmas**

Thu at 7pm,
Birmingham Town Hall, B3 3DQ. Call 0121 780 3333

Andre Rieu And The Johann Strauss Orchestra

Wed at 7pm,
£45.70 - £105.70
Genting Arena, Birmingham, B40 1NT. Call 0121 780 4141

Christmas With The Salvation Army

Sun at 2.30pm, 6pm,
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 780 3333

Christmas Carol Concerts

Mon, Tue at 7.30pm
Wightwick Manor and Gardens, Wolverhampton, WV6 8EE. Call 01902 760100

Metropolitan Brass Quintet

Sat at 10.30am,
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 780 3333

So This Is Christmas

Wed at 8pm - 10.30pm,
£21 - £26
Birmingham Town Hall, B3 3DQ. Call 0121 780 3333

The Ukulele Orchestra Of Great Britain

Mon at 7.30pm, £24
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 780 3333

Only Men Aloud

Mon at 7.30pm - 10pm,
£27.50
Birmingham Town Hall, B3 3DQ. Call 0121 780 3333

THEATRE**The Nutcracker**

Fri at 7.30pm, Sat at 22.30pm,
7.30pm, Sun at 1pm,
£19 - £56

Beyond The Barricade

Sat at 12am, £19.50 - £21.50
Prince Of Wales Centre, Cannock, WS11 1DE. Call 01543 578762

The Lion The Witch And The Wardrobe

Fri at 10.15am, 2.30pm, Sat at 2pm, Mon at 2.30pm, Tue at 10.15am, 2.30pm, Wed at 2.30pm, Thu at 10.15am, 2.30pm, £7.50 - £35

Birmingham Hippodrome, B5 4TB. Call 0844 338 5000

Tom Stade: You're Welcome!

Wed at 8pm, £16.50 - £18.70
Wolverhampton Wulfrun Hall, WV1 1RQ. Call 0870 320 7000

Ken Dodd: The Happiness Show

Sun at 7pm,
Wolverhampton Civic Hall, WV1 1RQ. Call 0870 320 7000

TALKS**Dr John Cooper Clarke**

Sun at 7.30pm,
£16.50 - £26.95
Wolverhampton Wulfrun Hall, WV1 1RQ. Call 0870 320 7000

Check out full listings in **the ticket** in Friday's Express & Star

It's panto time, from Smee to you



Get ready for a Chuckle or two — The Chuckle Brothers with John Altman as Captain Hook and Ross Carpenter as Peter Pan

PANTOMIME season is here, oh yes it is, with Wolverhampton Grand Theatre's swashbuckling panto Peter Pan opening on Saturday and running until January 24.

Produced by Qdos Entertainment, the world's biggest panto producer, this year's Christmas show stars family favourites The Chuckle Brothers as Paul and Barry Smee, EastEnders actor John Altman as Captain Hook, Coronation Street's Lucy Evans as

Tinkerbell and newcomer Ross Carpenter as Peter Pan.

Showbiz veterans Paul and Barry Elliott, real life brothers better known to millions as The Chuckle Brothers, are regular favourites at Wolverhampton, performing at the Grand Theatre every year as part of the UK tours. It has been 22 years since Paul and Barry were last at the Grand for a panto season. In 1993 they played the Henchmen

in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs alongside Linda Lusardi and Stu Francis.

John Altman is best known as 'Nasty' Nick Cotton in EastEnders and was among the show's original cast in 1985. Lucy Evans played the role of Lauren Wilson in long-running ITV soap Coronation Street.

Tickets can be booked by calling 01902 42 92 12 or online at the www.grandtheatre.co.uk website.

Back to the 60s with Hairspray



WELCOME to the 60s when the cast of Hairspray lacquer up their beehives and quiffs for a soul-singing and dancing alternative to panto in the West Midlands this festive season.

Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre will host to the musical which will star Benidorm favourite Tony Maudsley in a frock as Edna Turnblad, a role played by John Travolta in the movie version of the show.

Hairspray is being performed 22 times at the venue from December 14 to January 2 as part of a national tour. Set in 1962 Baltimore, Hairspray tells the story of high school student Tracy and her dreams to dance her way on to national TV and break the colour bar that stops black and white youngsters dancing together. Freya Sutton will play Tracy, for which she won acclaim during the show's UK tour in 2013.

Tony Maudsley is best known as hairdresser Kenneth in the Costa Del Sol-set TV comedy series and can also be seen in The Job Lot. Ex-BBC Peter presenter Peter Duncan will play Edna's ever-loving husband Wilbur and Liverpudlian actress Claire Sweeney will be play villainous Velma Von Tussle with X Factor star Brenda Edwards as Motormouth Maybelle.

General manager of the New Alexandra Theatre, Andrew Lister, said: "We always feel we have a unique offering here at the venue for the festive period and this year is no exception."

Hairspray won eight Tony Awards on Broadway and had a hit run in the West End where the Ednas included Michael Ball, Phil Jupitus and Brian Conley.

Merry times with festive laughter

LAUGH your way into the season with veteran comic Ken Dodd celebrating 60 years in showbiz with his Laughter Show at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Sunday. Don't anticipate an early night as the Liverpudlian comedian has a reputation for giving plenty of value for money.

Ed Byrne is at the Wulfrun Hall tonight (Thu), the same night that Mock The Week regular Andy Parsons is at Birmingham Town Hall. Paddy McGuinness talks about fatherhood in his Daddy McGuinness show at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Saturday. Canadian comedian Tom Stade, who used to live in the Black Country, is at the Wulfrun Hall on Wednesday.

String along for a plucky performance

THE Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain celebrate 30 Plucking Years at Birmingham's Symphony Hall on Monday. Expect a fun time with eight ukuleles, 16 hands and 32 strings, and one happy audience.

There's an audience with the Bard of Salford when punk poet John Cooper Clarke brings his sharp wit to the Wulfrun Hall on Sunday.

On Monday vocal group Only Men Aloud present their Christmas show at Birmingham Town Hall. Jools Holland and his Rhythm and Blues Orchestra have sold out their December 17 gig at the Symphony Hall.

Easy listening stars are out and about

KING of the waltz, Dutch violinist André Rieu brings his Johann Strauss Orchestra to the Genting Arena on Wednesday.

It's Christmas Party time with The Overtones at Symphony Hall, Birmingham, tomorrow (Fri) and the Sinatra Centenary concert is at the same venue on Saturday. Christmas with The Neales at Birmingham Town Hall is a Sunday home date for the family group from Britain's Got Talent. Merrill, Jay and Jimmy Osmond recreate the cosy magic of The Andy Williams Christmas Special, the US TV show that made their name, at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Thursday, December 17.

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Plenty of grandeur – sit back and admire The Lawns main dining area



The lobster dish that helped win Mat regional chef title



Prosecco anyone? Staff will bring you some bubbly to go with your bubbles



The very Parisienne chic decor is perfect for a girls' getaway

This festive treat is a real feast and it's just too, too good to wait for

By Maria Bagnall

CHRISTMAS. Yes. It's well and truly hurtling towards us and with it comes the frantic shopping trips and hopes for weather to produce that special ambience only a sprinkling of snow can create. Fingers crossed.

As unpredictable as the British weather may be, Thornton Hall's spa is one place you are guaranteed the white stuff whatever the forecast, albeit in a small corner of Cheshire with the UK's only snow cave.

You can't exactly build a snowman, but fresh powder on your body after a blast in the sauna certainly invigorates the senses – be sure to wear flip flops as due to the chilly floor you'll end up showing off your best Happy Feet penguin impression to people

looking much cooler than you. Roughly 60 miles from Wolverhampton in The Wirral, the four-star Thornton Hall hotel is within easy reach and an ideal place to base yourself for some festive down time or, as the season demands, stocking up on gifts as it's just five minutes from designer shopping outlet Cheshire Oaks.

Extensive
But there is much, much more to Thornton Hall than its snow cave, extensive gym, spa and outdoor hot tub area where staff bring you Prosecco to wash down your strawberries.

The real treat is in the Lawns Restaurant where its three AA Rosettes for fine dining has attracted an exemplary team to dish up a sublime selection of dishes ranging from

lobster to lamb and a magnificent cheese board with around 40 deliciously whiffy options.

As one of eight regional finalists for the Great British Menu last year, you'd expect something pretty special from chef Matt Worswick's menu and it doesn't disappoint.

A hot spot for the regions' finest dining, there are various options to chose from, but as a huge fan of the series it was an unmissable opportunity to tuck into the very same tasty tidbits those lucky judges enjoyed in the finals with the four-course tasting menu and wine to accompany each course – who could resist?

Fellow diners are supposed to have the same menu but with so many options my partner chose from the main menu, giving us a good cross section of dishes.

Describing courses individually would turn this review into a Lord of the Rings

style epic series. Suffice to say each dish was imaginative, presented with perfection containing balanced flavours. I found the whole experience right up my street from the 36-page wine list, a great selection of gins like the Botanist and Hendricks, to views of open countryside from the outdoor hot tubs, an exemplary team of staff throughout the hotel.

Even the bar ladies who served up zingy lemon sherbet cocktails in the opulent bar with metallic low lights, rich embroidered fabrics and cool retro furniture left me a bit lost for words.

But one thing's for sure, Thornton Hall is a feast for the senses in every sense of the word and deserving of its exemplary reputation. I'll definitely be heading back...and won't be waiting until next winter.

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The Rolling Stones – Exhibitionism

Exhibitionism is the first international exhibition charting the story of The Rolling Stones and will take over two entire floors of the prestigious Saatchi Gallery, next summer.

Nine thematic galleries, over 500 original artefacts, and striking cinematic and interactive technologies will lead visitors through the band's fascinating 50 - year history.

It will feature original stage designs, rare guitars and instruments, iconic costumes, unseen video clips, audio tracks, personal diaries and album cover artwork.

There will also be collaborations and work by an array of artists, designers, musicians and writers – from Andy Warhol, Shepard Fairey, Alexander McQueen and Ossie Clark and Martin Scorsese.

Also enjoy some free time in London for shopping or sightseeing in the theatre district where the shops, market stalls and eateries of Covent Garden are just a short walk away, and the famous stores on Oxford Street and Regent Street are close by too.

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CHOICE



Rita Ora

The X Factor
(ITV, 8pm)

The three finalists assemble for the first of this weekend's live Grand Final shows. Weeks of lively activities, gruelling boot camps and nerve-jangling live shows come to a head over the next two nights, but before the winner is named, the would-be pop-stars must first make it through two more showdowns, as judges Simon Cowell, Rita Ora, Cheryl Fernandez-Versini and Nick Grimshaw are once again called upon to deliver their verdict on each act's singing prowess. The act with the lowest public-vote figures will face an early exit from the contest. Naturally, the stakes are the highest they've ever been for the hopeful pop icons, and as ever, presenter duo Olly Murs and Caroline Flack are on hand to provide moral support.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00 Saturday Kitchen** Live. **11.30 Simply Nigella.** (R) **12.00 BBC News: Weather.** **12.10 Football Focus.** **12.50 Saturday Sportsday.** **1.00 Lewis Hamilton: Making History** – F1 2015 Review. **1.30 BBC Breakfast.** (R) **3.00 Film:** *Toy Story* (1995) Pixar animated adventure, with the voice of Tom Hanks. **4.15 Final Score.** **5.15 Celebrity Mastermind.** (R) **5.45 BBC News.** **5.55 Regional Programme.** **6.00 Pointless Celebrities.** Louis Theroux, Nancy Strang, Michael Underwood, Angelina Bell, Calum Best, Angie Best, Gary Lineker and Harry Lineker take part in a family-themed edition of the quiz.

6.50 Strictly Come Dancing. Only five couples remain as the pro-celebrity dancing contest reaches the semi-finals, and with a shot at a place in the final on the line, the challenge is increased to match the stakes. This week, Craig Revel Horwood, Bruno Tonioli, Len Goodman and Darcey Bussell have challenged the contestants to master two routines, Latin and Ballroom, with the judges providing their verdict after each performance. Once the stars have had both their turns on the dance-floor, the lines will be opened for viewers to cast their votes.

Tomorrow, the bottom two couples will be asked to take part in a nerve-racking dance-off, which will ultimately determine which of them will not be claiming a place in the grand final next weekend.

8.30 Casualty. Connie refuses to let her personal life interfere with her duties as clinical lead, but in doing so, she ends up dismissing Jacob's concern about a very real problem.

9.20 The National Lottery Live. Ore Oduba presents as the all-important winning numbers are revealed.

9.30 Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special. Mrs Brown tries to work out what is inside a parcel addressed to Cathy and discovers Roy is planning to have plastic surgery. (R)

10.00 BBC News: Weather.

10.20 Match of the Day. Gary Lineker presents; National Lottery Update. **11.40 The Apprentice.** (R) **12.40 Weather for the Week Ahead.** **12.45 BBC News.**

BBC2

6.05 Race to Super Bowl 50. (R) **6.55 Film:** *Anything But Christmas*. (2012) **8.25 Film:** *Ray Harryhausen: Special Effects Titan*. (2011) **10.00 Animal Park.** **10.30 Kangaroo Dundee.** (R) **11.00 Children's Animal Crackers.** (R) **11.30 Film:** *Toy Story* (1995) Pixar animated adventure, with the voice of Tom Hanks. **4.15 Final Score.** **5.15 Celebrity Mastermind.** (R) **5.45 BBC News.** **5.55 Regional Programme.** **6.00 Pointless Celebrities.** Louis Theroux, Nancy Strang, Michael Underwood, Angelina Bell, Calum Best, Angie Best, Gary Lineker and Harry Lineker take part in a family-themed edition of the quiz.

6.50 Strictly Come Dancing. Only five couples remain as the pro-celebrity dancing contest reaches the semi-finals, and with a shot at a place in the final on the line, the challenge is increased to match the stakes. This week, Craig Revel Horwood, Bruno Tonioli, Len Goodman and Darcey Bussell have challenged the contestants to master two routines, Latin and Ballroom, with the judges providing their verdict after each performance. Once the stars have had both their turns on the dance-floor, the lines will be opened for viewers to cast their votes.

Tomorrow, the bottom two couples will be asked to take part in a nerve-racking dance-off, which will ultimately determine which of them will not be claiming a place in the grand final next weekend.

8.30 Casualty. Connie refuses to let her personal life interfere with her duties as clinical lead, but in doing so, she ends up dismissing Jacob's concern about a very real problem.

9.20 The National Lottery Live. Ore Oduba presents as the all-important winning numbers are revealed.

9.30 Mrs Brown's Boys Christmas Special. Mrs Brown tries to work out what is inside a parcel addressed to Cathy and discovers Roy is planning to have plastic surgery. (R)

10.00 BBC News: Weather.

10.20 Match of the Day. Gary Lineker presents; National Lottery Update. **11.40 The Apprentice.** (R) **12.40 Weather for the Week Ahead.** **12.45 BBC News.**

ITV

6.00 CITV: *Fort Boyard Ultimate Challenge.* **6.25 Pat & Stan.** (R) **6.30 Pat & Stan.** (R) **6.35 Dino Dan:** *Trek's Adventures.* (R) **6.50 Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures.** (R) **7.00 Signal Stories:** *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*. (R) **7.10 Sooty.** (R) **7.25 Super 4.** (R) **7.40 Mr Bean: The Animated Series.** (R) **8.00 The Aquabats! Super Show!** (R) **8.25 Thunderbirds Are Go.** **9.00 Jessie.** (R) **9.25 Murder, She Wrote.** (R) **10.20 The Jeremy Kyle Show.** (R) **11.25 The Jeremy Kyle Show.** (R) **12.30 ITV News:** *Weather.* **1.40 Judge Rinder.** (R) **2.40 Film:** *The Polar Express.* (2004) **4.30 Doc Martin.** (R) **5.35 Regional Programme:** *Weather.* **5.45 Catchphrase Celebrity Special.**

6.45 ITV News: *Weather.*

7.00 The Chase: Celebrity Special. Jimi Mistry, Gemma Jones and James Cosmo answer general knowledge questions and work together to tackle quiz genius the Chaser and secure a cash prize for charity. Last in the series. (R)

8.00 The X Factor. The three finalists assemble for the first of this weekend's live Grand Final shows.

Weeks of lively auditions, gruelling boot camps and nerve-jangling live shows come to a head over the next two days, but before the winner is named, this would-be pop-stars must first make it through two more show-downs, as judges Simon Cowell, Rita Ora, Cheryl Fernandez-Versini and Nick Grimshaw are once again called upon to deliver their verdict on each act's singing prowess. The act with the lowest public-vote figures will face an early exit from the contest. Naturally, the stakes are the highest they've ever been for the hopeful pop icons, and as ever, presenter duo Olly Murs and Caroline Flack are on hand to provide moral support.

9.00 OI XL. Jimmy Carr, Aisling Bea and Danny Bhoy compete alongside resident panelist Alan Davies, as question master Stephen Fry muddles through the middle show of the middle series.

9.45 TOTP2: Christmas 2015. Christmas-themed hits from the archive, including songs by Tom Jones, Adele, Wizard, Slade, Wham, Jona Lewie, The Pogues and Kirsty MacColl. *Shakin' Stevens*, Pulp and Cilla Black.

10.05 The Jonathan Ross Show.

11.10 ITV News: *Weather.*

11.30 Pier Morgan's Life Stories: *Burt Reynolds.* (R)

12.20 Jackpot247. **3.00 The Jeremy Kyle Show USA.** (R) **3.45 ITV Nightshift.**

CHANNEL 4

6.15 The King of Queens. (R) **6.40 The King of Queens.** (R) **7.30 Anglesey Sandman Triathlon.** **8.00 Everybody Loves Raymond.** (R) **8.30 Everybody Loves Raymond.** (R) **9.00 The National Lottery Line.** **10.00 Frasier.** (R) **10.30 Frasier.** (R) **11.30 The Big Bang Theory.** (R) **12.00 The Big Bang Theory.** (R) **12.30 The Simpsons.** (R) **1.00 The Simpsons.** (R) **1.30 Channel 4 Racing.** Live coverage from Cheltenham and Doncaster. **4.00 Come Dine with Me.** (R) **4.25 Come Dine with Me.** (R) **5.00 Come Dine with Me.** (R) **5.35 Come Dine with Me.** (R)

6.05 Come Dine with Me. Fun-loving salesman Charlie Spiteri hosts the final festive dinner party in south-east London, hoping to impress his guests with a three-bird roast and a snow machine. (R)

6.30 Channel 4 News.

7.00 The World's Weirdest Weather. Weather conditions that cause fish to be washed ashore in India and draws sharks to the coast of Brisbane. Plus, an unusually heavy snowfall in Tucson, Arizona and strange circles in the Namibian desert, as well as foot of hailstorms, lightning and thunder Special.

8.00 Grand Designs. Kevin McCloud follows software executive Andy and garden designer Nicki, who are planning to build a "floating" house on the Thames, which would be the first of its kind in the UK. (R)

9.00 Film: Red 2. (2013) Premiere. Former CIA agent Frank Moses reunites his squad of retired operators for a mission. A devastatingly powerful new weapon has been stolen, and it falls to Frank's team to retrieve it – which means facing lethal assassins, terrorists and corrupt government officials out to steal the device. Action thriller sequel, starring Bruce Willis, Helen Mirren and John Malkovich.

11.15 TFI Friday. Martin Freeman, Idris Elba, Paul Heaton and Jacqui Abbott, Rita Ora and Sigma join Chris Evans for the entertainment show mixing music and chat with stunts and skits. (R)

12.20 Adam Hills: Happyville Live. (R)

1.15 Alan Carr: Chatty Man. (R) **2.10 Fargo.** (R) **3.20 Hollyoaks.** (R) **3.30 River Cottage Bites.** (R) **5.40 Kirstie's Vintage Gems.** (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **8.55 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.** **9.30 The Saturday Show.** **9.45 Live at the Apollo.** (2008) **9.50 Film:** *Santa Who?* (2008) **10.20 Film:** *The Perfect Holiday.* (2007) **10.30 Family comedy.** starring Morris Chestnut and Gabrielle Union. **3.10 Film:** *The Nine Lives of Christmas.* (2014) Premiere. Romantic comedy, starring Brandon Routh and Kimberly Sustad. **4.55 Film:** *Once Upon a Christmas.* (2000) Premiere. Family drama, starring Kathy Ireland. **6.35 5 News Weekend.** **6.40 Funniest Fails, Falls & Flips.** **7.05 Police Interceptors.** An officer tackles a drunken youth in a domestic dispute, a speeding motorist causes chaos after crashing into a gas main, and Doug gets to grips with a burglar. (R)

8.00 Can't Pay? We'll Take It Away. In the final episode of the series, Stewart and Ian head to Nottingham to recover a debt of nearly £3,000 in unpaid rent. In East London, Paul and Phil head to a flat expecting a routine eviction, but get more than they bargained for when they find dodgy wiring, illegal substances, and two men sleeping in squalid conditions. Meanwhile, Stewart and Victor hunt down one of their biggest debts of the year – £66,000 owed by a businessman. Finally, in West London, Steve and Ben try to evict a tenant who has broken the terms of his lease. **9.00 Film:** *MacGruber's Wonder Emporium* (2007) **7.40 Film:** *Back to the Future Part III* (1990) **10.05 The Xtra Factor.** (2011) **11.05 Celebrity Juice Christmas Special.** **12.00 Film:** *The Hounds of Jingle Hell II* (1971) **1.05 Vip Tap 1.** **4.00 Total Bonkers.** **5.00 Guinness World Records 2.30 Animal Practice 2.50 Teleshopping 5.50 ITV2 Nightshift.**

4.45 Film: *Empire of the Seas: How the Navy Forged the Modern World* **8.00 Britain's Outlaws: Highwaymen, Pirates and Rogues** (2002) **9.00 The Bridge** (2011) **11.15 Family Guy** (2012) **12.20 Asian Provocateur** **2.50 Great Movie Mistakes III:** Not in 3D **3.00 together 4.00 Close**

BBC Three

7.00 Don't Tell the Bride **8.00 Top Gear 9.00 Live at the Apollo** **9.30 Film:** *8 Mile* (2002) **11.15 Family Guy** (2012) **2.20 Asian Provocateur** **2.50 Great Movie Mistakes III:** Not in 3D **3.00 together 4.00 Close**

BBC Four

7.00 Empire of the Seas: How the Navy Forged the Modern World **8.00 Britain's Outlaws: Highwaymen, Pirates and Rogues** (2002) **9.00 The Bridge** (2011) **11.15 Family Guy** (2012) **12.20 Asian Provocateur** **2.50 Great Movie Mistakes III:** Not in 3D **3.00 together 4.00 Close**

ITV2

11.35 The Xtra Factor. **12.35 I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here!** Coming Out. **1.40 Elf:** *Buddy's Musical Christmas*

2.30 Film: *Scorpio 3.35 You've Been Framed at Christmas. **3.35 Film:** *MacGruber's Wonder Emporium* (2007)*

7.40 Film: *Back to the Future Part III* (1990) **10.05 The Xtra Factor.** (2011) **11.05 Celebrity Juice Christmas Special.** **12.00 Film:** *Release the Hounds: Jingle Hell II* (1971) **1.05 Vip Tap 1.** **4.00 Total Bonkers.** **5.00 Guinness World Records 2.30 Animal Practice 2.50 Teleshopping 5.50 ITV2 Nightshift.**

ITV3

11.50 Rosemary & Thyme **12.50 Agatha Christie's Marple** **2.55 A Touch of Frost**

4.55 Film: *Columbo: Last Salute to the Commodore* (1976) **7.00 Rosemary & Thyme** **8.00 Midsomer Murders** **10.00 MacGruber's Wonder Emporium** (2007)

7.40 Film: *Back to the Future Part III* (1990) **10.05 The Xtra Factor.** (2011) **11.05 Celebrity Juice Christmas Special.** **12.00 Film:** *Release the Hounds: Jingle Hell II* (1971) **1.05 Vip Tap 1.** **4.00 Total Bonkers.** **5.00 Guinness World Records 2.30 Animal Practice 2.50 Teleshopping 5.50 ITV2 Nightshift.**

ITV4

2.35 Film: *Blues Brothers* (2000) **9.00 The Goldbergs**

5.00 Film: *The Car Chasers* **6.00 Fifth Gear**

7.00 Storage Wars: *New York 8.00 River Monsters* **9.00 Film:** *Hard to Kill* (1990)

11.05 Film: *The Quest* (2006) **1.00 Film:** *The Sentinel* (2006) **2.55 ITV4 Nightshift**

3.00 Teleshopping

4.45 Film: *Blade Runner* (1982) **5.00 The Rugrats Movie** (1999) **4.25 Earthquake** (1974) **6.50 Field of Dreams** (1989) **9.00 Insidious: Chapter 2** (2013) **11.10 Shutter Island** (2010) **1.35 The Keep** (1983) **3.35 Close**

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31st - 2nd Jan NEW YEAR & LONDON SALES

JANUARY 2016

25th - 29th WINTER WARMER TO TORQUAY

FEBRUARY 2016

15th - 19th WARNER'S HAYLING ISLAND

15th - 19th FALMOUTH WINTER ESCAPE

22nd - 26th LIVERPOOL & ADELPHI HOTEL

27th - 28th KEW GARDENS & KENSINGTON PALACE

29th - 2nd MAR CORNWALL ALL INCLUSIVE

MARCH 2016

11th - 14th BOGNOR REGIS

14th - 18th CHARMING SIDMOUTH

18th - 20th YORK, LINCOLN & CASTLE HOWARD

19th - 20th SETTLE to CARLISLE RAILWAY

21st - 25th FLORAL HARROGATE & DALES

26th - 30th EYOUTH & HERITAGE COAST

APRIL 2016

4th - 7th BEAULIEU & NEW FOREST

7th - 8th DOWNTON ABBEY

8th - 11th PAIGNTON & GLORIOUS DEVON

8th - 11th DUTCH BULFIELD

11th - 15th SHANKLIN - ISLE OF WIGHT

15th - 17th NATIONAL STUD TOUR, NEWMARKET

MAY 2016

4th - 7th TORQUAY

MON 15TH - FRI 19TH WARNER HAYLING ISLAND

MON 15TH - FRI 19TH FALMOUTH

MON 22ND - FRI 26TH LIVERPOOL & ADELPHI HOTEL

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7th NATIONAL SPACE CENTRE, LEICESTER

16th CHINESE NEW YEAR LONDON

16th COVENTRY TRANSPORT MUSEUM

16th COVENTRY CATHEDRAL & SHOPPING

17th HEREFORD FOR MARKET DAY

18th HISTORY & SCIENCE MUSEUM LONDON

19th ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM OXFORD

20th HARRY POTTER STUDIO TOUR

25th MYSTERY DAY OUT & LUNCH

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MARCH 2016

9th DUNHAM MASSEY (NT)

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23rd BRITISH MUSEUM OXFORD

27th BRITISH MUSEUM

28th BRITISH MUSEUM OXFORD

29th BRITISH MUSEUM

30th BRITISH MUSEUM</p

FILM CHOICES

MONDAY

The Christmas Switch, Channel 5, 3.45pm
Premiere. A hustler agrees to rethink his outlook on life when he agrees to magically swap bodies with a dying man at Christmas. Fantasy, starring Brian Krause and Cedric Smith. (2014)

TUESDAY

Mr Miracle, Channel 5, 2.05pm

A trainee guardian angel is sent to Earth to help people, but quickly finds he has a lot to learn about human behaviour. Undaunted, he chooses as his first assignment a woman whose father has recently died, making a bumbling attempt to boost her confidence so she can make a fresh start. Fantasy comedy, starring Rob Morrow and Britt Irvin. (2014)

WEDNESDAY

A Star for Christmas, Channel 5, 3.45pm

A baker's life is thrown into chaos by a recent break-up and her co-worker leaving her to cope alone during a busy period. Things look up when she falls in love with a handsome customer, but does not realise he is a movie star in town to shoot a film. Meanwhile, her ex-boyfriend is less than happy about her new romance. Drama, starring Briana Evigan. (2012)



A1: Artificial Intelligence, Friday, BBC2, 11.05pm

THURSDAY

Christmas Wishes, Channel 5, 2.05pm

A teacher at a boarding school agrees to look after troubled students who are unable to go home for the Christmas holidays. His career is threatened when a pupil vandalises a beloved local tree where people can leave their handwritten wishes, but he rallies the townsfolk to repair the damage. Family drama, starring Jason Gedrick and Richard Harmon. (2012)

FRIDAY

AI: Artificial Intelligence, BBC2, 11.05pm

A highly advanced robotic boy is created with one purpose – to love his owner as a parent. When he is rejected by his 'mother', he is left to roam the bleak landscapes of a futuristic America with a fellow android, searching for a means of becoming a real boy in the hope of regaining her love. Steven Spielberg's sci-fi drama, starring Haley Joel Osment, Jude Law, William Hurt and Frances O'Connor. (2001)

Luther is looking to find the missing link

It's the summer of 2013 and millions of viewers have tried to catch their breath after one of the scariest scenes in TV history.

An episode of Luther boasted a tension-filled set up, and as a killer emerged from under a victim's bed, singletons across the land were suddenly wary about their checking under the mattress.

But there was a light at the end of the TV tunnel.

Case solved, the eponymous sleuth's trademark shabby coat was hurled off a London bridge and arch enemy/stalker Alice asked him that loaded question: "So, now what?"

So ended Neil Cross's hugely successful series, and fans were also left wondering what the future held for one of Blighty's best loved and his unhinged ally.

Of course, the problem with making a crime drama as good as Luther is the fact that the cast and crew are in such high demand it's tricky getting them in the same place at the same time.

With Idris Elba hard at work on Star Trek Beyond, and assorted other projects, there's little wonder fans had to wait for a couple of years for this latest offering.

All good things come to those who wait, and Idris has found enough time in his busy schedule to make this two-parter.

We catch up with the eponymous protagonist stand on the edge of a London building, and like much missed fellow BBC 'tec River, he is also haunted by a ghost from his past.

Or is he actually on the edge of a Dover cliff, dreaming of what could have been?

Well we can tell you he's on a leave of absence from the police force, laying low in a decrepit cottage, he is soon dragged back to London by an alarming piece of news.

With a serial killer at large in the city, Schenck and his squad must find a link that connects each victim. The authorities might be baffled, but Luther is no stranger to psychopaths, and before long he's back in action. But has he finally met his match?

Very possibly. With a solid supporting cast including Patrick Malahide, Darren Boyd, Game of Thrones' Rose Leslie, and series regulars Michael Smiley and Dermot Crowley, safe to say that we're in safe hands as Neil Cross unveils his latest twisted masterpiece.

And yes, that is Warren Brown returning as DS Justin Ripley, who met a violent end during the last series.

But what of Luther's flame-haired associate Alice? Is she alive or dead, and will she be returning?

Well that's just one of the assorted storylines that should keep you guessing as the mini series plays out.

Cross has suggested an Alice spin-off project, which is not a bad idea.

Ruth Wilson has won much acclaim for the role, so who wouldn't want to see Idris guest star in that for a short spell instead of carrying a series on his formidable shoulders?

For now, hold onto something comforting and prepare to be gripped once more.



Idris Elba stars in Luther, Tuesday, BBC1, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY

Las Vegas with Trevor McDonald
ITV, 9pm

The broadcaster continues his exploration of the American city by tracking down Andrew Didonato, a former New York mobster hiding out in Vegas, but who is about to quit town for a new life. Over on the Strip, Trevor meets former showgirl Lisa Medford at the Riviera, a casino and hotel that once played host to Elvis and the Rat Pack but is now shutting its doors for the final time, before settling in on a poker game with Antonio Esfandiari, one of the world's most successful professional players.

The Best of Bad TV: The 70s
Channel 5, 10pm

A trawl through the decade's programmes, featuring clips of car-crash interviews, terrifying children's dramas, hoaxes and baffling game shows. Limited technology and low budgets led to memorably poor special effects in sci-fi shows, while soaps tried to escape the grim realities of strikes, unease and civil unrest. There were also memorable clashes between music stars and TV presenters, from David Bowie to the Sex Pistols. Contributors include Gareth Thomas, Paul Darrow, Jane Rossington, Tony Adams, Paul Henry, Peter Purves and Valerie Singleton.

TUESDAY

Stargazing Live: Brit in Space
BBC2, 7pm

O Briaain and Professor Brian Cox present coverage of British astronaut Tim Peake's arrival at the International Space Station. At London's Science Museum, Dara and Brian will be joined by experts, including former ISS commander Chris Hadfield and Britain's first astronaut, Helen Sharman. They'll share insights into what it's like living in space and what Tim will face from his first night on the ISS. Plus, Dallas Campbell reports live from Kazakhstan with Tim's first phone call home from space.

WEDNESDAY

Journey Down the Yukon – A Soldier's Challenge

BBC2, 7pm

Nine years after being blown up in Afghanistan, Ben Parkinson, one of Britain's most wounded soldiers, takes on a mission to canoe down one of the world's most remote river systems, Canada's Yukon River. The soldier had both legs amputated and was left with a severe brain injury after the

explosion in 2006, with medical staff warning him that he may never walk or talk again. However, he is defying the odds by taking on the expedition, where all that stands in his way are bears, wolves and rapids – and the battle with his own damaged and broken body.



Las Vegas with Trevor McDonald, Monday, ITV, 9pm

THURSDAY

The Nation's Favourite Bond Song
ITV, 9pm

007 doesn't just have the girls, the cars and the gadgets – he also has the best theme songs. For more than 50 years, the James Bond franchise has been bringing us some of the most memorable hits in movie history, but which is the nation's favourite? Do we think Nobody Does It Better than Carly Simon, or did the series

reach an All Time High with Rita Coolidge? Well, now we can find out as ITV brings counts down the nation's 20 favourite Bond themes, while also hearing some of the stories behind the songs from contributors including Paul McCartney, Duran Duran, A-ha and lyricists Leslie Bricusse and Don Black. A host of celebrities will be revealing their personal favourites, and we get to hear how Sam Smith recently gave the series its first ever UK number one with Writing's On the Wall.

FRIDAY

Text Santa Christmas Jumper Day
ITV, 8pm

Phillip Schofield, Holly Willoughby and Amanda Holden lead a host of stars rallying support for this year's charities – Macmillan Cancer Support, Make-A-Wish UK and Save the Children. Highlights include a visit to Coronation Street with a Text Santa twist, Ninja Warrior receiving the star treatment when a line-up of celebrities take on The Wall, plus Lord Grantham having a tough decision to make in a Downton Abbey special. Alesha Dixon, Caroline Flack, Christine Bleakley, Olly Murs, Paddy McGuinness and Stephen Mulhern also feature amid the music, surprises and special guests.

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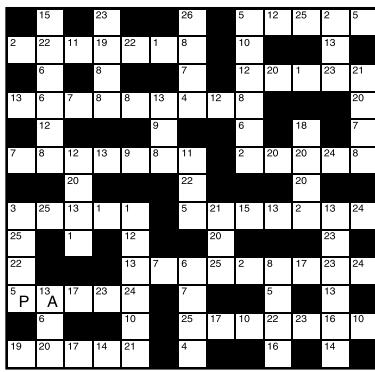
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Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
F	G	C	H	N	W	M	Z	V	U	K	Q	O	A	Y	B	P	S	X	T	R	D	I	J	L	

Quiz

- Which ceremony takes place during the 3rd week of July on the Thames?
- In which Dickens novel does the quotation 'Barkis is willin'' appear?
- In which country was the Rosetta stone found?
- In what sort of building would you find a rood screen?
- In which London park is Rotten Row?
- What sort of animal is a drongo?
- What is the former residence of the Moorish kings at Seville called?
- What is the Italian name of the city of Turin?
- Who was the youngest of the four Beatles?
- In which country was Israeli politician Menachem Begin born?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Delaware; 2 1962; 3 Alva;
4 Out of condition to fight; 5 Scotland;
6 Andrew Jackson; 7 Jezebel; 8 Kenyan;
9 House sparrow; 10 1975.

Niner: RESULTING

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

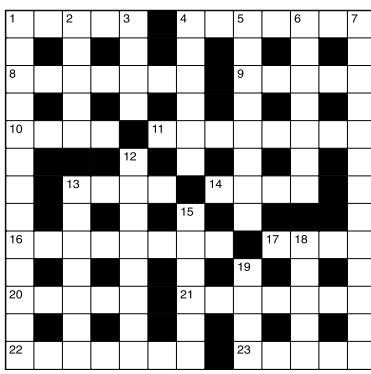
Cryptic Clues:

Across

- Supports the defenders on the field (5)
- Operates the hoisting device and stops (5,2)
- 8 & 9 Ac. Express opinions on the radio? (3,4,5)
- See 8 Across
- The infant has nothing to use as a trumpet (4)
- Select fish for preserving (8)
- Strike a kind of link (4)
- Kitty indicates the lid (4)
- 16 & 21 Ac. How the dutiful minister signs himself (8,7)
- In the Bible Saul conceals one of the patriarchs (4)
- The return of the Hebrew maiden will make one complain (5)
- See 16 Across
- Took up permanent residence and paid (7)
- Goes to war for financial rewards (5)

Down

- What record-breaking jumpers do at Rogationtide (4,3,6)
- Leave the vehicle first - it's put in the hold (5)
- Decline a piece of kitchen equipment (4)
- Part of the flower I split badly (6)
- Romantic entanglement? (4-4)
- Particular place is rearranged (7)
- They've already had some degree of success (4-9)
- One in authority - and that's not just hearsay (8)
- Is it smoked by the great man in bed? (7)
- Not accustomed to mint (6)
- A bit of unceremonious language (5)
- One bird or a hundred on the line (4)



Quick Clues:

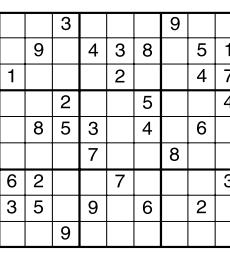
Across

- Sea (5)
- Go down (7)
- Envious (7)
- Wrong (5)
- Cook (4)
- Act imperiously (8)
- Cupid (4)
- Fair (4)
- Repulsive (8)
- Chief (4)
- Well done! (5)
- Incorrect (7)
- Ingredient (7)
- Terror (5)

Down

- Unpleasant (13)
- Elude (5)
- Midday (4)
- Dictator (6)
- Roomy (8)
- Obvious (7)
- Noted differences (13)
- Despair (4,4)
- Rival (7)
- Whimsical (6)
- Conscious (5)
- Group of animals (4)

Sudoku



Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

4 1 2 7 1 5 3 8 9
9 6 8 7 2 4 5 1 3
3 1 5 6 9 2 4 7
2 3 4 9 7 6 1 8 5
8 7 6 3 2 5 9 0 4
5 9 6 1 4 3 2 1 3
6 7 2 4 1 9 1 3 5 8
5 4 9 2 3 8 7 6 1
1 8 3 5 6 7 9 2 4

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 3 Direction; 6 Rear; 9 Miniskirt; 10 Paths; 11 Aegis; 14 Links; 15 Nude; 16 Easel; 18 Eats; 20 Infer; 21 Scale; 24 Parish; 25 Schematic; 26 Dean; 27 Orangeade. Down: 1 Propeller; 2 Castanets; 4 Isis; 5 Elite; 6 Take in; 7 Oars; 9 Mouse; 11 Aisle; 12 Surf-rides; 13 Near thing; 17 Lilac; 19 Screen; 22 Leave; 23 Scar; 24 Clever; 25 Tread; 3 Speculate; 8 Ornate; 9 Interrogation; 10 Leader; 11 14; 14 Sire; 15 Time; 16 Lapse; 18 Men; 20 Rogue; 21 Deter; 22 Moving; 25 Excavator; 26 Lean; 27 Certitude. Down: 1 Loathsome; 2 Hidebound; 4 Pens; 5 Clear; 6 Lament; 7 Tune; 9 Idyll; 11 Taper; 12 Disguised; 13 Detergent; 17 Error; 17 Depart; 22 Enact; 23 Axle; 24 Mood.

Thinking space

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On this holiday the choice of hotels are offered in and around the town of Sorrento and excursions include a boat trip to the beautiful island of Capri, home to the famous Blue Grotto; the city of Pompeii, whose state of preservation is astonishing; a visit to the still-active volcano of Vesuvius, and a visit to Naples, home to the Archaeological Museum that houses some of the finest finds from the nearby excavations.

The Amalfi coastline offers stunning views and a full day is spent driving the meandering roads, admiring the exclusive resort of Positano, the picturesque village of Amalfi and then Ravello, perched in its breathtaking location boasting delightful small cafes and the Villa Rufolo, a charming collection of medieval buildings.

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A full day is spent at Bergamo with a guided tour, whilst at Lake Maggiore there is chance to enjoy some free time in its most attractive town, Stresa.

Travelling back to Switzerland, Lugano is an eclectic mix of traditional Swiss values and the more laid-back Latin influences from across the border. Explore the cafe-lined main square, the myriad of twisting lanes of the old town or discover the dense network of shops.

RIVIERA



Lake Garda, Venice and Verona

Eight days from £619

Lake Garda is an area of outstanding natural beauty and on this holiday there is a selection of hotels to choose from in either Malcesine or Riva del Garda, both of which are beautifully surrounded by lofty peaks and situated at the more scenic north end of the lake.

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Venice is unique and caught in a time warp. Culturally rich as any city can be, see many of the countless places of interest on a guided tour, including St Mark's Square and its Basilica, the Campanile and Doge's Palace — home to the most powerful man in Venice. A trip on a gondola is also a must in this stunning and fascinating city (payable locally).

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Rarity a key to success

By James Parker

THE people pushing Citroën's new upmarket DS breakaway brand are realists.

They know it could take 20 years before their cars are talked about in the same breath as, say, Audi.

Which, readers with long memories will remember was once itself seen as rather the upstart against the might of Mercedes or BMW – but no longer.

The assault on the posher end of the popular car market for Citroën comes in the shape of three DS models which are really old Citroëns with the badges removed.

We'll have to wait until 2017 for the first DS with no link to a previous Citroën as the brand builds its way to a six-strong range. So for now, it's a case of mild makeovers to keep the DS name in the news.

Which brings us to the car you see here, a very gentle reworking of the previous Citroën DS4 but now called simply DS 4 (note the distance between the number in the new one; these things matter to brand builders) with the emphasis on peppering up the bits you can see.

That means new paint choices (38 colour combinations in fact, applied by five people and taking seven hours to complete) and new brighter LED headlights.

Inside, you can option a very plush leather finish and play with a new seven inch touchscreen that controls things like navigation and music and saves a dozen buttons – which you might find neat and elegant or a nuisance when you need to change something quickly.

Those look-at-me lines have consequenc-

The newcomer is the first car in the PSA Group (that's Peugeot, Citroën and DS) to offer Apple CarPlay, which links more recent iPhones with the screen and lets you use the navigation app on your phone and allows Siri voice control work to manage your emails.

The new DS 4 comes with a second choice of body style in the shape of the Crossback, which uses mildly raised suspension, wheelarch trims, roof bars and touches of black to give it the look of an SUV, the current darling of the car world and selling in shedloads.

In fact, the Crossback is no more likely to tackle a grassy field than its lower riding sibling, but it looks the part of urban warrior. You can bet one or two of the all-new DS models waiting in the wings will also have SUV genes, and perhaps rather more convincing ones at that.

There are six engines on offer, including a 1.2 litre three-cylinder petrol unit and a 2.0 litre diesel in three power outputs. A 'proper' automatic gearbox is available for the first time, replacing the one that jerkily changed a conventional 'box for you.

Prices of the hatchback version start at £19,495 for a car in Elegance trim with the small petrol engine and top out with the 180 horsepower diesel Prestige automatic at £25,495.

The DS 4 Crossback has a more restricted range, taking in two diesels but starting at the 1.2 litre petrol version at £21,745 and stretching to the top auto diesel for £26,495.

They all share the same modestly catwalk looks, with dramatic curves and creases and an interior that's both obviously well built and looks smart enough to give a junior Audi a run for its money.

Those look-at-me lines have consequenc-



Assault on the posher end of the popular car market for Citroën comes in the shape of three DS models.

es; the rear doors are tiny (even the DS people say they're 'for occasional use') and space is the back is tight. Larger adults need not apply.

Out on the road, the 150 horsepower diesel pulled strongly and returned 46mpg – way short of the official figure, but then that's the nature of the official test at the moment. A 1.2 petrol version showed 41mpg.

Both cars were restless on less than perfect roads but it's looks and perhaps even rarity value that will make the case for this DS as we wait for the full-on models to ar-

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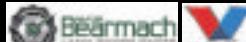
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Official Government Test Environmental Data. Fuel consumption figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ emissions (g/km). Vauxhall, Highest: VAUXHALL Astra GTC 2.0i VXR 16v Turbo 280PS Stop/Start with 18", 19" and 20" wheels, M6: Urban: 26.2 (10.8), Extra-urban: 43.5 (6.5), Combined: 34.9 (8.1). CO₂ emissions: 189g/km. Lowest: VAUXHALL Astra 5 Door Hatchback 1.6 CDTi 110PS Tech Line ecoFLEX Stop/Start with 16" and 17" wheels, M6: Urban: 72.4 (3.9), Extra-urban: 80.7 (3.5), Combined: 76.3 (3.7). CO₂ emissions: 97g/km. Suzuki, Highest: SUZUKI Swift 1.6 2WD, M6: Urban: 33.6 (8.4), Extra-urban: 54.3 (5.2), Combined: 44.1 (6.4). CO₂ emissions: 147g/km. Lowest: SUZUKI Vitara 1.6 2WD, M6: Urban: 61.4 (4.6), Extra-urban: 76.4 (3.7), Combined: 70.6 (4.0). CO₂ emissions: 106g/km. Official EU-regulated test data are provided for comparison purposes and actual performance will depend on driving style, road conditions and other non-technical factors. *All offers are subject to availability and terms and conditions of the Motability scheme, please ask for full details. Pictures for illustration purposes only. Information correct at time of publication. E&OE.

DRIVETIME



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Black Country 4x4 Ltd regularly appears on Big Centre TV, the local TV channel for Birmingham, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Solihull and The Black Country. The team takes part in a programme entitled 'LandRovers Live' with top triathlete star Sean Conway and will soon be featuring on the Discovery Channel, once again with Sean.

Black Country 4x4 Ltd regularly counts Sean amongst friends and customers.

The Zimbabwe-born British endurance swimmer, author and professional photographer is a passionately keen Land Rover owner and enthusiast who often relies on Black Country 4x4 Ltd to repair and maintain his vehicles.

Sean owns a Land Rover Defender and has recently purchased an original 1960's 'Landie' Series 2 from Black

Country 4x4 Ltd, which sells used Land Rovers as well as maintains them.

Black Country 4x4 Ltd, is a small but friendly independent Land Rover and Range Rover service, repair and used sales specialist based in Dudley. The technicians concentrate entirely on maintaining and repairing Land Rover products, and everything from vehicle recovery and servicing to major repair work can be provided along with complete engine and transmission rebuilds, refurbishment work and vehicle modification.

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For more information or call 01384 484 853 or visit Black Country 4x4 Ltd, Unit B, Woodside Industrial Estate, Pedmore Road, Dudley DY2 0RL. A new website will be on the way soon.

More sport in the Vitara

By John Griffiths

Suzuki's familiar Vitara was a bit of a trend-setter when it first hit the streets more than a quarter of a century ago.

Back in those days it had little competition in the compact SUV sector, for people who wanted practicality with all-weather ability.

Now, it seems, almost every major car maker is dipping its toes in what has become the fastest growing sector of the market. But a new lighter, sleeker and better equipped Vitara launched earlier this year is holding its own, and now a new secret weapon has been unveiled: a more sporty, high specification version with turbo power.

Prices haven't yet been announced, but the new Vitara S is expected to come in at around £21,000 with Suzuki's Allgrip four wheel drive system. The entry level 1.6 litre, two wheel drive version starts the new Vitara range launched earlier this year at £13,999.

The new 1.4 litre 'Boosterjet' petrol engine is new to Suzuki and with 140PS on tap it's 17 per cent more powerful than its 1,600cc stablemate. That, naturally, makes the S version the quickest Vitara over the benchmark 0 to 62mph sprint with a time of 10.2 seconds – 1.3 seconds faster.

But not many of us are interested in the traffic light sprint: the big story is that the turbo engine has 220Nm of torque, 41 per cent more than the 1.6 and that makes an impact on how the Vitara S drives in everyday situations.

Unlike a standard petrol engine which needs revs to extract the power, maximum torque is available from just 1,500rpm so it pulls strongly from just above tickover, cruises more smoothly and quietly, and has stronger in-gear acceleration for rapid overtaking. It feels more relaxed, with almost effortless progress. Motorway cruising is particularly quiet, adding to the refined and 'grown up' feeling of the car.

Yet in spite of the advantages it is capable of averaging 53.3mpg according to official figures – just 1mpg behind the less powerful 1.6. Suzuki's engineers have carried out a range of other technical improvements to improve efficiency. Apart from your costs at the pumps, it means this most powerful and sporty Vitara has a CO2 rating of 127g/km, pretty impressive (and tax efficient) for a four wheel drive.

Suzuki's Allgrip four wheel drive system is well proven. With the three position switch set to 'Auto' only the front wheels are powered to save fuel in normal driving conditions, with torque diverted to the rear axle only if the sensors detect slippage. Sport mode apportions power for best cornering performance on twisty roads, while 'Lock' is designed to ensure maximum traction on all four wheels in snow and mud. There's also a hill descent control, which uses pulses of braking to keep the car at a crawl on steep, slippery slopes without tobogganing. All Vitara's have 'hill hold control' to stop the car rolling backwards. With its new suspension system, ride and dynamics in the Vitara S are more car like than rock 'n' roll SUV. While it still has the ground clearance and firm springing it needs to tackle tough off-road work it's sufficiently well damped to smooth out the bumpier bits of a typical b-road.

Cornering

Steering is light enough for manoeuvring around town, but provides adequate feedback on the open road. Body roll is well suppressed so that brisk cornering isn't an uncomfortable business where the height of the vehicle (great for easy access and visibility) becomes a disadvantage.

It's combination of electronic stability systems, ABS and all wheel drive, were put to the test in a slalom and 'avoidance' test involving the sort of rapid changes of direction you'd make in an emergency. It was enough to convince journalists taking part that the Vitara was able to cope with the sort of situation you'd really rather avoid on the road.

If the worst does happen, it has seven airbags and a body structure which enabled it to score a maximum five stars in the EuroNCAP crash tests.

As you'd expect from a new sporting flagship model, there are visual clues which set it apart – notably the unique 17-inch black alloy wheels prominent chrome grille and matt chrome wing mirrors.

The Vitara range is well equipped as standard, and the S model is the flagship of the range, kitted out to premium saloon standard which makes its likely £21,000 price tag look even more competitive. It includes a seven-inch central touchscreen which controls the audio, navigation, and full smartphone connectivity systems.

Suede seats, automatic air conditioning, automatic and self-levelling headlamps, electrically heated and adjustable door mirrors, front and rear parking sensors, a rear parking camera, electric windows, rear privacy glass and electric windows are among the highlights. All Vitaras have a family-sized 375 litres of cargo space, rising to 710 litres if the split/fold rear seats are folded flat. Roof rails are standard.

The Vitara has undergone various makeovers but essentially it's been around since 1988 and there's a good reason for that: despite the growing competition buyers like it, and Suzuki has built up a strong reputation for reliability and customer service.

Price, of course, always plays a part in buyers' decisions so there will still be plenty going for the 1.4 litre petrol or diesel engined options. But while the Vitara S with its 1.4 Boostjet engine is at the top of the range price-wise, it's also the best equipped and sportiest version. And, arguably, offers the most refined driving experience too which will doubtless attract not only Suzuki drivers who want to change up, but converts from rival brands, too.



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Luxury on big wheels in 'palace'

By John Griffiths

If you're going to name your flagship car after a palace, you'd better be sure that it lives up to its billing.

Well you wouldn't expect great masters on the wall or the crown jewels, but SEAT's big seven seater does offer a taste of luxury on wheels.

Certainly it wasn't been enough to win the Alhambra no less than 13 'best MPV' awards in Britain and now it's become even better. The second generation car first seen in 2010 has undergone a makeover: few major changes on the outside but a raft of upgrades to the interior, communications technology and safety, plus new and more efficient engines.

With prices from £24,885 to £35,770 it is competitively priced for luxury family transport, undercutting even some of its own cousins from the Audi VW Group.

The Alhambra is, by any standards, a big car: if you're now carrying passengers you can fold down the rear seats and load a staggering 2,300 litres of cargo on board (more than some vans). But whereas some early seven-seaters were actually derived from vans the Alhambra experience is in the upmarket saloon class. Only with more room.

That is one of the reasons SEAT has powered up the two turbo diesel options – the 'old' 140PS is replaced by a 150PS version, and the 177PS by a 184PS.

In this class of car boosting the horsepower, and torque isn't all about performance, it's about providing the power and torque to drive a relatively heavy vehicle more smoothly and quietly. In a word, refinement.

That was evident with the test car, a £34,840 SE Lux in. It was powered by the 184PS version of the two litre diesel, mated to the now familiar DSG six speed transmission – probably the smoothest, most responsive automatic on the market. If you're in the market for this type of car, the £1,300 extra cost of DSG over manual seems like money well spent.

There's plenty of performance but this combination makes progress particularly relaxed, and quiet. That upmarket saloon feeling again.

The new Alhambra also now come with a dynamic chassis control button, allowing you to set up the dampers for normal, comfort or sport mode, for a more supple ride or a more sporting response to steering input.

Best seller

The SE Lux specification, although it is near the top of the price range, proved to be one of the best-sellers in the previous range. That's perhaps an indication that customers appreciate the value for money compared to a less well equipped rival. As an alternative, there's a sports themed range-topper, the FR Line.

The Alhambra doesn't feel its size on the road, and can be hustled along winding b-roads with confidence. Sports suspension and a limited slip differential on the 184PS versions add to the dynamic competence of this top-powered model.

Official figures credit this top-powered version a fuel average of 53.3mpg and CO2 emissions of 139g/km (exactly the same as the manual). For the 150PS version, the figures are 0 to 62mph in 10.4 seconds, 55.4mpg and 132mpg.

The third engine option is new to the Alhambra. It's a 1.4 litre petrol, but thanks to the now well proven TSI technology it turns out an impressive 150PS of power and 250Nm of torque: enough to tackle the benchmark sprint in 10 seconds and average better than 42mpg (CO2 rating 150g/km).

A few years ago a 1,400cc petrol engine would have seemed ludicrous in a car like this, for which it would have been underpowered and uneconomical. But that was before TSI – a small capacity, turbocharged engine – which many manufacturers now emulate. You get 1.4 litre economy when the engine is cruising on light loads, but the extra torque of a turbo when you need power for overtaking or tackling steep hills. Once again, it has the additional advantage of extra refinement in everyday driving.

On the outside, new LED tail lights, black high gloss B pillars, a new grille and new alloy wheels distinguish the facelifted Alhambra but it's inside where the biggest improvements have taken place. Practicality hasn't changed, with the five split-fold down centre and third row seats. Wide opening, sliding rear doors make access to the rear easier.

The centre colour touchscreen now comes with a range of connectivity options likely to appeal to the business user and younger family members. There's even a new 'Connect' specification, illustrating a range of systems by which mobile phone apps can be fully integrated with the in car systems.

There's a new multi collision braking system, designed to prevent the car being shunted into further danger even if the driver has been temporarily incapacitated in a collision. As befits a car designed for families, additional safety systems take centre stage with blind spot monitoring joining the standard electronic stability control and other electronic wizardry such as parking assistant and a driver fatigue warning.

It's not difficult to see why the Alhambra has become an awarded winner and this latest makeover will serve to keep it ahead of the pack.

It's roomy, refined, flexible and ideal for families, at a competitive price. The new, more efficient engines and the latest hi-tech connectivity options will make it even more of an attraction for business users.

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Bright start is soon snuffed out for Tivs

Tividale 1 Lincoln Utd 3

ONCE again Tividale failed to make a bright spell last for the whole 90 minutes as they slumped to another Evo-Stik First Division South defeat.

Debutant Tividale keeper Mihai Gherasim was called into action in the first minute to deny Ben Fairclough.

Robert Norris fired off target before Jack McGovern's cross was somehow turned wide by Tividale's Jacob Barnes as the visitors pressed.

Tividale responded and Tom Turton hit the bar before Chris Rabone was denied by Lincoln keeper Sam Vince.

The hosts made a perfect start to the second half when a Jason Chilton free-kick was stabbed home by Chris Sterling.

Malachi Farquharson wasted a chance to put Tivi 2-0 up and were made to pay when Nathan Whitehead cashed in on a slip by Gherasim to make it 1-1.

The goal seemed to deflate Tividale and they fell behind when McGovern netted from close range and the victory was secured when a wind-assisted cross from Daniel Brookes sailed over Gherasim and into the net.

Gherasim made some amends for his error and he came to the rescue with two brilliant saves.

Lincoln made the game safe with 15 minutes to go with a bizarre looking goal.

The visitors then controlled the remainder of the game as Tividale never put enough pressure on the Lincoln defence to get something out of the game.

The defeat leaves Tividale bottom of the table.

First premier win still eludes Tipton squad

Tipton Town 0 Dudley Town 1
TIPTON Town are still searching for their first West Midlands Premier Division win of the season after slipping to a single goal defeat at home to Dudley Town.

Dudley bagged the all-important goal on 10 minutes when tricky winger Christian Ekwalo capitalized on a Tipton defensive error to fire home.

Tipton responded far better thereafter but the driving and rapidly swirling wind was the real winner, disrupting any pattern of play with its sheer force and sudden vagaries and changes of direction.

Robbie Duffield came agonisingly near to salvaging a point for the hosts when his volley whistled just past the Dudley post with full-time just a couple of minutes away.

A game to forget for Old Hales side

Old Hales 1 Coventry & North Warwick 3

OLD Halesian Hockey Club Men's 1st XI suffered defeat to bottom-placed Coventry and North Warwick.

The defeat was in a game the Halesowen team will not want to remember when they saw the lead in the match taken away from them.

Despite taking the lead early on the Hales team, which saw three forced changes from the side that won last week, crumbled in the second half as their opponents ran away with the score.

Cole Hickman opened the scoring for Hales when a winding run from team mate Josh Randhawa saw him slip the ball under the C&NW keeper.

Hickman was in the right spot at the right time to knock the ball over the line, to make sure of the score from close range.

C&NW came out fighting in the second half, and soon they had levelled the scores.

The visitors were searching for their first win of the season and looked on their way when they took the lead soon after, with a reverse stick shot from the top of the circle.

Hales threw players forward looking for the equaliser in the final moments of the game.

The problem was this tactic left them exposed at the back, and C&NW were able to put the game out of reach when they exploited this oversight and

made in 3-1 with just three minutes of the match remaining.

In their final game before the Christmas break, Old Halesian Ladies 1st XI beat a Worcester side who were three places above them in the league.

Hales' performance was described as "their best ever", as they beat their opponents 5-2. Rae Andrews was deadly in front of goal, scoring a hat-trick, with goals also from Dawn Lewis and Jenny Cooper.

The Mens 3rd XI won 3-0 away at Bloxwich, and the Mens 4th XI won 7-0 against Stratford with using six different goal scorers.

The Badgers XI suffered their first loss of the season, with a 3-1 defeat against Worcester.

Martinez is likely to be out injured until next year

WOLVES have suffered another injury blow with the news that goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez is likely to be out until January.

The Argentine was expected to have returned to action by now but a troublesome thigh injury is taking longer than first thought to fully heal.

While able to train and handle the ball, Martinez cannot kick it at full pelt and the Wolves medical staff are reluctant to pinpoint an exact date for his return.

But the form of Carl Ikeme has lessened the need to rush Martinez back – and boss Kenny Jackett was full of praise for the 29-year-old.

Of Martinez, the head coach said: "He's out training and doing everything in terms of handling the ball. But his kicking, he still looks some weeks off being fit enough to play.

"The kicking muscle is going to take a while to heal and he'll need to get to 100 per cent before we want to risk him.

Carl Ikeme had 38 kicks on Saturday, either static kicks or back-passes, that's a lot of kicking.

"It might be around January time, that's a fair estimate. Our medical people are very reluctant to put a time on it with me, personally, but I understand why because they're trying to take it a stage at a time."

Aaron McCarey and Jon Flatt are both vying to be Ikeme's back-up and have been used on the bench in recent weeks.

Ikeme has been out of the side for most of this season, but Jackett said his professionalism had pleased him..

Parry will stay on as Wolves main sponsors

FORMER Wolverhampton boss Dave Parry is to stay on board with the club next season.

Parry, owner of the hugely-successful Parrys International coach tour operators in Cheslyn Hay, will be the main sponsor at Molineux for a staggering 16th season.

But he's also warned the club management they have to get it right in 2016 after some disappointing performances in recent seasons.

He said: "It's been a terrible couple of years, and we implemented a new scheme to say there was a bonus if they got into the play-offs.

"A significant part of our sponsorship is dependent on the club making the top four which hasn't materialised the last few seasons.

"We are more concerned next season that the club have to get it right."

A changed Hales side brings a win

Longton 6 Old Halesian 10
HALES had more changes with scrum half Dave Hadkiss replaced by debutant, and Worcester Academy 17-year-old, Jamie Keen at scrum half.

Loz Breese returned to the back row and Joe Oxford on the wing.

The Longton side lay in wait following their thrashing of Newport at the same ground two weeks ago.

Hales as usual came out of the blocks with constant pressure, the wind blowing diagonally behind them.

They reclaimed the ball from the kick off and put together 12 phases of great ball in hand play. Longton infringed in front of the posts after just four minutes and Oli Rayner converted for the lead.

Again, as the norm, Hales maintained the pressure with some great individual runs from No.8 Jay Martin, hooker Sam Jones and second row Tom King making inroads into the Longton 22.

Adapted

The set scrum was also dominated by the visitors front row Louis Padian, Jones and skipper Rich Taylor keen at No.9 was given ample possession and quickly adapted to the pace using both forwards and backs to penetrate the defence.

Taylor picked up and drove through for an excellent try, converted by Rayner.

In the second half, apart from the odd break through their defences by Carl Robinson, Breese, Leach and Jones, Longton were in control.

Their pressure was rewarded with two penalties on 42 and 60 minutes.

Old Hales first team are at home this Saturday to Newport (Salop) kick off 2.15pm.

Kidderminster 17 OH 2nds 33
Tries came from Harry Higgs, Tom Lewis, Nathan Newman (3), Jake Shellis (2), Kieron Haynes, Jon Harris and conversions from Jake Shellis.

OH 3rds 44 Bridgnorth 3rds 10
Tries came from Elliot Hickman (2), Dan Smith, Matt Weaver, Toby Wood, Steve Deakin, Dan Sheasby, Joe Bradley.

Terriers get their teeth into Blues



Frustration: Michael Morrison at the final whistle after Blues suffered another defeat

Blues 0 Huddersfield 2

BLUES slumped to yet another home defeat as lowly Huddersfield picked up a valuable three points with the victory at St Andrew's.

The hosts never recovered from a disastrous start when Joe Lolley gave the Terriers a shock lead after just 31 seconds.

Blues attempted to get back into the game – and out of their recent slump in fortunes following

an outstanding start to the season – but an 83rd-minute goal from Nahki Wells settled the issue for the visitors.

Blues, with only one home win in their previous six games at home, were expected to be more positive. Instead they again started with only one striker, which played into the hands of Huddersfield as they exploited the situation and get the first three points for new manager David Wagner.

The Terriers were bright and adventurous and certainly responded to the call from Wagner to adopt a more attacking style.

And they made a dream start after just 31 seconds when Blues were completely caught wrong-footed by Sean Scannell.

Final whistle

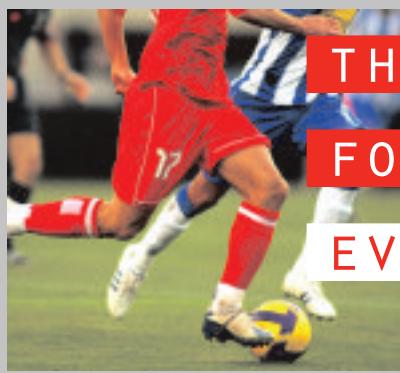
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Clegg will continue as a Heathen

MAX Clegg will stay in Cradley colours next season – and boss Will Pottinger has immediately challenged him to be the National League's top rider.

Clegg comes in on a 9.72 average and Pottinger is confident he can maintain that figure in what he feels will be the biggest year of his short career so far.

Pottinger, said: "I've got no doubts whatsoever that Max has got what it takes to be the National League's best rider.

"He's shown on numerous occasions what he is capable of and has contributed a high proportion of points in many of our team victories over the last few seasons.

"He did a very good job for us last year; I can't recall too many meetings where he didn't score double figures so he's definitely proved himself at this level but now he'd like to be the best.

"Max's average does take up quite a sizeable chunk of the team's points limit but at least we're safe in the knowledge that we've got an out-and-out No.1 who you can fully rely on as you know what you're going to get from him."

Meanwhile, Clegg himself is delighted to be lining up for the Heathens – particularly as they have moved back to Wolverhampton after a season at Birminham.

He said: "I always wanted to be back with Cradley – even more so when I knew they were moving back to Monmore.

"It's a track I go well on and riding there every Monday with Wolverhampton in the Elite League as well should do me good. Racing in all three leagues, with Edinburgh in the Premier League as well, is going to be something new for me but I'm confident I'm going to have a really good year with all my teams."

TD grab a share of the points after losing the lead

Team Dudley 2 FC Stafford 2

FC Stafford made the second of their four consecutive away fixtures and matched the result from the previous week.

Stafford were without the service of Matt Bickley, Alex Barnfather, Matt Rhodes and George Kirkland from the previous week but we're able to recall Lee Melvin, Ryan Brown and Sam Watferall to the squad.

The visitors had the first effort when Ben Smith saw his drive saved and then went close when Ryan Brown struck the post.

Dudley took the lead from a corner just before the break but Stafford were level in the second half when Smith hammered home.

Smith then fired Stafford in front from the penalty spot after Thomas Duffy had been fouled.

But Stafford's victory hopes were dashed when Nathan Jones fired in a fine-kick.

The game opened up as fresh introductions for Dudley were accompanied by the arrival of Danny Clarke for Stafford.

Hales changes help bring in a victory

Page 35

Terriers get their teeth into Blues

Page 35



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Villa can't hold on to lead at Saints

Southampton 1 Villa 1

VILLA'S winless run was extended to 14 matches as they failed to hold on at a Southampton side who entered the game on the back of three consecutive defeats.

Joleon Lescott gave the visitors an undeserved lead and exceptional opportunity with a goal in the first half, but they remain bottom of the Premier League after substitute Oriol Romeu secured a 1-1 draw.

After Wednesday's 6-1 Capital One Cup defeat at home to Liverpool, Saints manager Ronald Koeman had spoken of his team's lack of balance between defence and attack and his belief

Football

it may be necessary to alter their approach. The manager retained their familiar 4-3-3 shape, only recalling fit-again captain Jose Fonte for Steven Caulker in central defence, and the promising James Ward-Prowse for Jordy Clasie in midfield.

Koeman may have been worried about his team's poor run, but his concerns were minimal in comparison to Remi Garde.

In the three games since his appointment at Villa, the Frenchman has overseen two defeats and a draw and from the team which lost 3-2 at

home to Watford came in Rudy Gestede, Leandro Bacuna, Jores Okore and Lescott.

Given he had yet to improve Villa's fragile confidence, the suspicion remained that an early Saints goal would result in a further loss of belief and another convincing defeat.

Southampton's approach immediately after kick-off suggested they shared that belief, and had they secured the opening goal their efforts deserved a comfortable victory would almost certainly have followed.

Instead, Dusan Tadic fired over the crossbar and Sadio Mane's second-minute burst of pace and cut-back had created space for him to shoot.

Team want Rondon to be fearless

ALBION'S players love 'tireless' Salomon Rondon according to keeper Boaz Myhill, and they're desperate for the striker to start taking his chances.

Rondon terrorised the Tottenham defence on Saturday but was left ruined missed opportunities for the second week running.

If the Venezuelan had scored his header at Upton Park and managed to control Craig Gardner's cross at The Hawthorns, Albion could be on a three-match winning streak.

All three of his goals have come from his head, and with Saido Berahino out of favour, there is now more onus on the £12million striker to find the net.

"All the lads love him," said Myhill. "You've just got to watch the way he plays.

"It's tireless, his running, and he suits the way we play. He's getting his chances now and hopefully he can start sticking some away because it's the reward he deserves for the hard work he puts in.

"He's a great player, he's done really well for us."

Myhill himself is now looking over his shoulder anticipating the return of Ben Foster.

Out since March with a damaged anterior cruciate knee ligament, Albion's former number one is now back in training.

"It's definitely a strange situation going to pop up soon," said Myhill. "There's obviously three of us here now and everybody wants to play.

"We'll see how it goes, it's down to the manager.

"It's great for the manager to have options, it's what they want in every position. We've got it, so the ball is in the manager's court."

Meanwhile, Stephane Sessegnon is in a double for Sunday's game.

Brummies set the season ticket tarif

BIRMINGHAM Brummies have confirmed their season ticket and race night admission prices for the 2016 campaign.

2016 Season Ticket prices are: Adults - £150, seniors & students - £130, children (6-16) - £20, table in grandstand £25.

2016 Race night admission prices: Adults £13, seniors & students £11, children (6-16) £2, children (5 & under) free.

An application form can be downloaded from www.birminghambrummies.co/admission

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*** The Chronicle, a Midland News Association Ltd publication, printed by the company at Ketley, Telford. Thursday, December 10, 2015

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